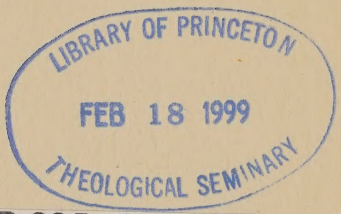
MARTIN LUTHER
as a
PREACHER

H. J. GRIMM



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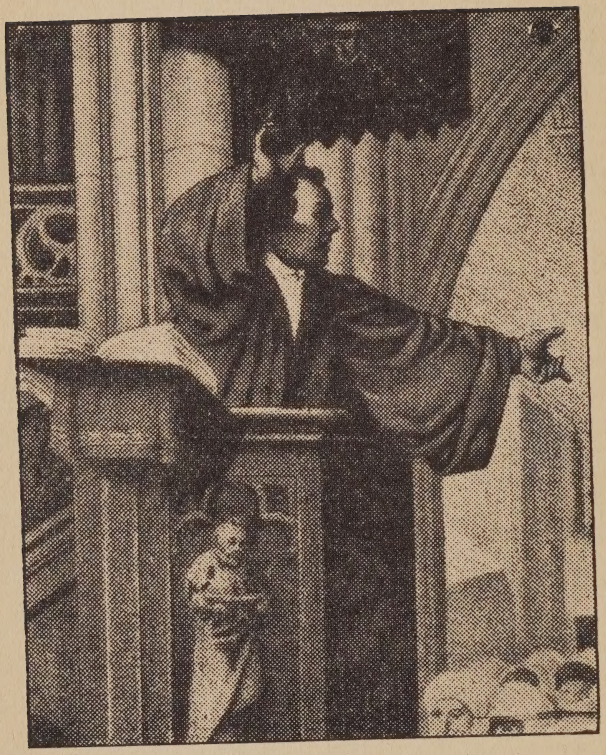

LUTHER PREACHING

Martin Luther as a Preacher

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"I will call this Luther a truly great man — great in intellect, in courage, affection, and integrity; one of our most lovable and precious men." — CARLYLE.

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To My Father

Rev. Henry F. Grimm

and My Mother

Ella Lepien Grimm

PREFACE

The numerous volumes on Luther that constantly issue from the press indicate that we have not learned all that ought to be known concerning this great reformer, and that the modern world has not lost interest in this hero of the Reformation. His personality, character, activities, and writings still present numerous problems for study and analysis; and so far, it seems, only a beginning has been made in this respect.

This is particularly true of the study of Luther as a preacher. No major work has as yet been published on this phase of his activities, although he preached practically all of his life. Very little has been done as far as analyzing his sermons is concerned, although it was these sermons which were preached and published throughout all Germany that attracted the interest of thousands of admirers and followers, and brought them to a better understanding of the practical side of the reformational doctrines. Luther's preaching and sermons must certainly have played a very important part in the reformational movement, and must have influenced both laity and clergy tremendously. It is well known that his art of sermonizing and preaching was patterned after and followed by the Protestant preachers in Germany for many decades.

It is because of the obvious importance of Luther as a preacher that I have searched all of the meagre

accounts of the reformer's activities in this line that were available; that I have studied and analyzed in detail all of his Latin sermons written and preached during his transitional period, 1514-1520, and several of his subsequent German sermons; and that I have attempted to show his art of preaching and the part this played in the Reformation in Germany. If the following pages in any way indicate what immense possibilities there are in this field, I shall not consider this task to have been in vain.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. W. H. Siebert of Ohio State University for his helpful suggestions and for the use of his library. Dr. M. Reu, Dean of the Wartburg Seminary and a well known Luther scholar, has been so kind as to indicate various problems in this field of research and to send me some valuable books on this topic. I am also indebted to Prof. P. H. Buehring of Capital University and to my father, Rev. H. F. Grimm, Orange Grove, Texas, for the use of their libraries. H. J. G.

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MARTIN LUTHER AS PREACHER

"Beweis' dein Macht, Herr Jesu Christ!
Der Du Herr aller Herren bist.
Beschirm dein' arme Christenheit,
Dass sie dich lob in Ewigkeit."

Dr. Martin Luther, 1541.

CHAPTER I

THE PREACHER

THE WORLD at the beginning of the sixteenth century was ready for a religious reformation. The simple teachings of Christ had developed into the intricate, complicated system of Romanism, a religion which was more a matter of form and ritual than a concern of the heart. The influence of a Francis of Assisi and a Bernard of Clairvaux seems to have died out entirely, and the world looked forward to a new preacher of the Gospel of Christ. Germany was the first country to take a lead in a thoroughgoing reform, and to produce a man who could lead conscientious minds to seek truth in the Word of God and salvation in Christ alone.

Demand for Reform

To be an outstanding leader of this movement which was about to change the map of entire Europe, and which was to affect every social and economic phase of mankind, required a character and personality that was at once a product of the past and a herald of the future; a character which was dominated not only by a patriotism for the fatherland, but also by a spirit of cosmopolitanism. The leader needed to be a "Weltbuerger." He needed to be a preacher who was versed in the

Demand for a Leader

learning and the culture of the day, who understood the people with whom he lived, who had the vision of an ideal that ought to be attained.

Such a man was Martin Luther. He was a man of the hour. He possessed the characteristics that would make him a preacher who could be understood, admired, respected, and followed. In order to obtain a good estimate as to the position and influence of this herald of the Reformation, therefore, requires a rather detailed consideration of his personal appearance and qualities.

Luther

It is commonly acknowledged that our general impression as to the appearance of Luther has been influenced by the almost innumerable portraits which were supposed to have been made by the artist of the Reformation, Lucas Cranach the Elder. We invariably think of him as a man of considerable portliness, with broad peasant features, firm and full jaws, curly, well-groomed hair, and in general as a short, rotund person. Modern investigators have shown that this general impression is by no means an exact one, but is merely a type that has gradually developed and found universal acceptance. They have found that only four portraits of Luther can be ascribed to the elder Lucas Cranach with any degree of certainty. It has also been discovered that the famous painting of Luther in the altar of the city church in Weimar, the classic representation of the type mentioned above, was not the work of Cranach the Elder, but of his son, Lucas Cranach the

Appearance

Luther's Portraits

Younger, and that it was done nine years after Luther's death.[1] Furthermore, these admittedly genuine Cranach portraits neither agree with each other,[2] nor with the descriptions that have been handed down to us by Mosellanus, Melanchthon, and other contemporaries.[3] It might also be stated, that even these portraits were poor works of art when compared with other paintings of that time, and that they do not do the Reformer justice. This is seen when we compare the portraits of Melanchthon made by the Cranachs with the well known copper etching by Duerer and the red pencil drawing by Holbein in Windsor. In the former Melanchthon looks emaciated and starved enough to exact pity. In the reproductions by Duerer and Holbein, however, he impresses us as a great man of genius and learning.[4] It is unfortunate, indeed, that neither of these better artists ever had the opportunity of seeing Luther and handing on to posterity a more exact likeness of him.

Although we cannot depend upon any of these portraits for an exact picture of Luther, we nevertheless can come to some definite conclusions as to his appearance. It is generally agreed that Luther was a man of medium height. Peter Mosellanus, a moderate Catholic who had attended the Leipzig Debate, describes him as a man "of middle height with a slender body worn out both by study and care, so that you can almost count

Stature

1. Boehmer, Luther, p. 3, note.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 316.
3. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 261.
4. Boehmer, Luther, p. 6.

his bones."[1] He was certainly not above middle height, for then Cajetan, before whom Luther appeared at Augsburg in 1518, could not have persisted in calling him "fraterculus."[2] But this does not mean that Luther's appearance gave an expression of weakness. His entire attitude and deportment indicated strength. He had a "peculiar erect bearing, bordering on stiffness, so that he seemed rather to be bending backward than forward."[3] Nearly all of his portraits picture him as a man of considerable strength. The woodcut of March, 1521, by Cranach, which Preserved Smith calls the best portrait of the Reformer in existence, gives "so plain an impression of will and strength of character, that all who run may read."[4]

Facial Expression

The few contemporary accounts which treat of Luther's appearance usually mention his dark, piercing eyes. Almost all who met Luther were impressed by the restless fire that flashed from them.[5] Even Cardinal Cajetan wished that he might never see those piercing glances again. Aleander, the papal legate at Worms, imagined that his eyes had the fire of a demon's. They appeared to the Swiss Kessler to "glitter like stars, so that it was scarcely possible to look at them." After his death another friend called them "falcon's eyes," and Melanchthon found in those "brown and

1. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 261.
2. Peter Bayne, I, p. 495.
3. McGiffert, p. 240.
4. Smith, Luther, p. 118.
5. Ibid., p. 316.

yellow encircled pupils the courageous look of the lion."[1] His hair was dark and never sparse, although it turned gray comparatively early in life. In general, his facial expression was one of firmness mingled with tenderness. Albert Burer wrote to a friend, in 1522, that Luther was a man "in whose face one may read benevolence, charity, and cheerfulness."[2]

It may be said that Luther's general appearance was one of uncommon youthfulness, in spite of the numerous cares and responsibilities with which he was incessantly confronted.[3] We are told that a hostile Italian gentleman, Vergerio by name, who visited Luther at Wittenberg in 1535, underestimated his age by nearly ten years, and that Luther enjoyed this man's mistaken impression considerably. *Uncommon Youthfulness*

In dress his tastes were of the simplest. Ordinarily he wore the layman's jerkin and hose, which were often of poor material and patched. On one occasion, when Katie complained that he had cut a piece out of his son's trousers in order to patch his own, he answered, "The hole was so large that I had to have a large patch for it. Trousers seldom fit me well, so I have to make them last a long time. If the Electors Frederick and John had not better tailors than I have they would mend their own breeches."[4] *His Dress*

After the custom of the day, Luther wore a full

1. Koestlin, p. 474.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 147.
3. Ibid., p. 316.
4. Ibid., p. 317.

black gown in the pulpit. It seems as though he dispensed with the cap altogether after he renounced his monastic vows. Of the appearance of the preacher in the pulpit he says in one of his letters, "If the Margrave and the Elector will have the Gospel preached in its purity, without human additions, and the two sacraments administered according to their institution, and will discontinue the intercession of the saints, and the carrying of the sacrament in procession, the masses for the dead, and abolish holy water, and consecrated salt and herbs, and will have pure responsories and hymns sung in processions, then let him go on in God's name, whether he have a silver or a golden cross carried, or wear a cap and gown of velvet, silk or linen; and if one cap and gown be not enough, let him put on three, like Aaron."[1] Frequently, particularly on festive occasions, Luther wore a gold chain around his neck, "an attempt at adornment which Vergerio found rather ridiculous. At all times a silver ring graced one finger. Luther's standards of cleanliness were relatively high. He had a bath-room with tubs in his house."[2]

Appearance in the Pulpit

A very good asset to Luther as a preacher was his unusually good voice. Very little is said as to its quality, but Mosellanus, who heard him speak at Leipzig, says that it was very "sharp and clear."[3] One man has characterized it as "clear, ringing, and flexible, . . . as stirring

His Voice

1. Jacobs, p. 329.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 317.
3. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 261.

as a bugle or as soothing as a lute."[1] It is certain that, if his voice had not carried well, he never could have held the attention of such large crowds of people as came to hear him, especially when he preached outside of Wittenberg. It is said that at Zwickau, in 1522, twenty-five thousand people gathered in the city court to hear him speak. Whether he spoke from the pulpit of a large church, or from the window or balcony of the municipal hall or castle, he was heard by all. That his voice was particularly pleasing is shown by a letter from Albert Burer to Beatus Rhenanus, March, 1522. "His voice is mild and mellow; his delivery is very graceful. Whoever heard him once will desire to hear him again."[2] Henry Stromer of Auerbach wrote in 1518 that he had heard "Martin Luther, a man famous for his eloquence."[3]

Having considered the preacher of the Reformation as he appeared before his audience, our next aim is to enumerate the characteristics which made him the outstanding pulpit orator of his time. First of all, Luther was blessed with such natural endowments that would make any preacher a well liked, popular leader among his constituents. These natural characteristics consisted primarily in (1) manliness of character, (2) a sympathetic love for humanity, and (3) a poetic love for nature.

Natural Endowments

One of the greatest assets of Luther's character

1. Hastings, Luther and the Reformation, p. 37.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 63.
3. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 199.

was his manliness of character. No one, whether of high or low rank, was ashamed to follow his leadership. The strong and courageous found in him their own qualities magnified; the weak and timid found in him qualities which they lacked. And if it is true that a man's greatness can be measured to a large extent by the quality and number of his enemies, Luther can come in for his share of credit in this respect. Popes and bishops, kings and nobles did not consider him too insignificant to offer him battle. He was a man among men, who had the valor and courage to defy both nature and men; and such a character is always admired and gladly followed.

Manliness of Character

Particularly noteworthy is his courage. Sitting in his obscure monastery cell at Wittenberg he wielded his dauntless pen against a powerful pope to whom countless thousands rendered humble obedience; against an able emperor in whose realm "the sun never set"; against an archbishop whose strength as a prince was comparable only with his greed for money and honor; against thousands of religiously apathetic clergymen whose means of subsistence were dependent upon the corrupt conditions of the time. He knew no fear. He believed the Word of God; he believed that he had been chosen as the special instrument of God to bring about such a renovation in the church on earth as the world had never seen. He "cast the bull of excommunication into the flames," and as the "spokesman of the nation placed himself at the head of the national movement away from Rome; with incom-

Dauntless Courage

parable audacity and openness he pronounced on all the great and small issues of the time like a prophet."[1] He went to Worms and faced the emperor with his imperial diet with not so much as a thought of retraction. He returned to Wittenberg from the Wartburg and preached such powerful sermons that the fanatics there were forced to flee. He wrote to the king of England that he could not sanction that regent's immoral practices. He had the courage to defend his position at Marburg, although the political leader of his cause, Philip of Hesse, was desirous of a union with the Swiss. Every day was a day of battle, and he faced his tasks with the valor of a hero. Spalatin wrote to the Elector Frederick of Saxony in 1520 that he "found Dr. Martin merry, who thanks your Grace humbly for your greeting. He thinks the pusillanimity of the priests increasing. . . . He is entirely undaunted, and has already begun his new book refuting the articles of the bull, and done a sixth of it."[2] Ulrich von Hutten wrote to Pirckheimer on May 1, 1521, "Borne up by divine inspiration he rejects all human council and relies solely upon God. He despises death as no man ever did."[3] Rubeanus wrote Luther in 1520, "Rumor constantly tells us how little you are frightened by the threats of the tyrants, how bravely you despise death, how much you wish to endure a thousand dangers for Christ's sake. We approve your courage and recognize the spirit of the Lord, but we fear that danger

1. Boehmer, p. 111.
2. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 405.
3. Ibid., p. 155.

will accrue to the world through this holy alacrity of yours. For when Martin is gone another will not soon appear so mighty in the Scriptures."[1] One writer says that "it is time to note how the miner's son, the penniless monk, aided only by heroism of character, takes rank among the governing personages of his epoch. . . . He began to act like a father to Frederick and to speak to him in accents of a king."[2]

Indomitable Will

Closely allied with this dauntless courage of the Reformer is his indomitable will. Whenever he determined upon a course of action, and felt certain that it was the right thing to do, no power on earth could make him change his mind. It is well known how little the pleas of his friends kept him from going to Worms; what little effect the threats and enticements of the Roman curia had upon his actions; how little even his own physical ailments kept him from doing that which he had set out to do. Tulloch, an English biographer of Luther, says, "To initiate the reform movement, which was destined to renew the face of Europe, and to give a higher impulse and nobler and more enduring life to all the Saxon nations, required a strong and gigantic will like that of Luther, which, instead of being crushed by opposition or frightened by hatred, only rose in the face of both into a prouder and grander attitude of daring."[3] Preserved Smith also gives a very good

1. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 409.
2. Bayne, I, p. 255.
3. Tulloch, p. 154.

summary relative to Luther's will and courage. "His early spiritual struggles, the things by which he profited and grew, his faith, his devotion to conscience and to truth as he saw it, and his indomitable will, stand out in his unconscious biography. No man in history has more thoroughly represented and more completely dominated his time. There have been more faultless men than Luther, but there have been none who have fought harder for a good cause. . . . And in Luther we have the most active brain, the most intrepid will, and the most passionate heart of his century."[1]

And yet, with all of this dauntless courage and strength of will power, this manly energy and vehemence of character, Luther was in no sense whatsoever a radical in his reforms. "His moderation was at least as conspicuous as his energy. . . He was very little of a theorist," and would much rather "rebuild and purify the church than supercede it. . . . Iconoclasm of every kind he abhorred."[2] His well known sermons[3] delivered against the radicals at Wittenberg immediately upon his return from the Wartburg clearly indicate this moderation. Those phases of the Catholic worship which are purely adiaphoristic were to be retained, lest the people of a weaker faith and mentality be offended.

Moderation

Furthermore, Luther's dauntless courage and

1. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, preface to Vol. I, pp. 6-7.
2. Tulloch, pp. 154-155.
3. Lutherlesebuch, p. 216.

indomitable will did not preclude that greatest of characteristics demanded of preachers and pastors, namely, humility. Henry Stromer, who had heard the Reformer at the Leipzig Debate, wrote of him, "It is extraordinary how much holy theological learning was modestly distilled by Martin. He seems to be a man worthy of immortality. . . . He was like a harmless sheep among wolves, and the more hostile they were to him the greater and more holy was his learning."[1] In his letters to Pope Leo, before the bull of excommunication was promulgated, he wrote in the most humble manner. Of his patron, Frederick the Wise, he at one time wrote to Spalatin, "For I am not worthy that any man should speak of me, still less that a prince should do so, and least of all that such a prince should do so."[2] One of the best examples of his humility is seen in his attitude toward the crowds that hailed him on his way to Worms. When they cried, "Luther forever," he told them to say, "Christ forever." To him the Gospel of Jesus was everything, and he considered himself but a tool in the hand of God.[3]

Humility

One other important characteristic that showed Luther's manliness was his poise and balance in religious matters. He was a man and did not try to be anything else. He did not go about with an air of sanctity; he did not attempt to give an impression that he had attained a spirituality higher

1. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 199.
2. Ibid., pp. 46-47.
3. Cf. Buchwald, Luther's Sermons, I, p. 17.

than that of those with whom he came into contact; he made no claims that he had received visions from God; that his soul had reached such heights of ecstasy that he must disdain everything worldly.[1] His entire attitude was characterized by good common sense, so that none of his friends and admirers need feel ashamed of any foolish and absurd speculations in religious matters. What he found in the Bible was the norm of his conduct as well as the substance of his religion and faith.

Poise in Religious Matters

His frankness and openness are known to all. In all of his dealings with men, friends or enemies, he could be depended upon. His opponents did not need to fear that he would pursue them with sinister tactics, but could be assured that Luther was a man and wanted to be met as a man. He went to Leipzig to take part in the debate there, not in order to flaunt before his hearers his profound learning and wonderful oratory, but to discuss with Dr. Eck the most serious problems of the day. He wanted the questions under consideration discussed purely on their own merits, and the parties concerned to enter the debate without prejudice or prepossessions. The fact that Eck did not debate on similar terms hurt him profoundly, and he could never forgive him. Whatever disturbed him at any time he expressed immediately, not only in his daily contacts, but also in his sermons, his debates, his lectures, and correspondence.

Frankness

1. Boehmer, Der Junge Luther, p. 113.

In addition to this manliness of character we also find another quality which endeared Luther to all who knew him, namely his intense love for humanity. "Everywhere and preeminently Luther was a man with a heart alive to all true human feeling, and burning with the most earnest and passionate aspiration after human good. When we remember that he was trained as a monk, and was in fact a monk till he was about forty-two years of age—that books rather than men were his chief study during the most fresh and formative period of life—it is truly wonderful to recognize in him such a breadth and intensity, such a variety and richness of human interest and affection. . . . He was of all the reformers the least technical and narrow in his feelings. His genial and vivifying humanity broke through conventional bounds, brushed them aside, and more than anything else, brought him nearer to the hearts of the German people."[1]

Love for Humanity

Luther's natural gifts as an orator and a preacher, his entire appearance, his voice, his inexhaustible store of words and expressions, his entire way of viewing life and religion, all made him a man of the people. He had come from the peasant class and had always lived with them on most intimate terms. Consequently he understood to the minutest detail their apperceptive powers, their powers of comprehension, and very seldom, if ever, did he go beyond this horizon in his sermons. He

Man of the People

1. Tulloch, pp. 152-153.

whose deep, sparkling eyes had greatly disturbed Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg; he who was able to discuss weighty matters with the most erudite men of his time; he who was thoroughly versed in philosophy, theology, and humanism, he was also able to let himself down to the level of the ordinary peasant, the servant, and the maid, and to talk about the kingdom of heaven to them in a manner in which all could not help but understand.

Interest in His Fellow Men

Luther was intensely interested in his fellow man. He saw the child at its mother's breast, the maid at work with a broom in her hand, the craftsman at work in his shop, the farmer sowing his grain, and the hunter on the field and in the woods. All of these pictures he uses in his sermons. He said at one time, "Would to God that by the work of my whole lifetime I had helped to better a single layman; I would be satisfied, would thank God and would gladly suffer all my books to be destroyed."[1]

Domestic Life

This interest in his fellow man is best illustrated by his domestic life. "It is impossible to conceive any nature more frank, open, and genial than that which the domestic history of the Reformer discovers. He lays bare his heart with the most guileless and winning simplicity; he has the most gay and jovial relish of all that is pure and good, however trivial, in life, sharing in the amusements of his children, counselling with his wife how to reward an old servant, entering with

1. Koestlin, p. 155.

the most earnest cordiality into the joys of his friends, and sharing his warm tears with them in their sorrows. None but a man of the most genuine kindliness could ever have bound fast to him so many friends as Luther did—old schoolfellows, such as Nicolas Emler and John Reinacke; brother monks, such as John Lange, whom he made prior of Erfurt; and all his more immediate fellow laborers in Wittenberg: Justus Jonas, Bugenhagen, Lucas Cranach, and Melanchthon; not to speak of the Electors Frederick and John, and their secretary, Spalatin."[1] His unbounded generosity and pleasant personality caused his domestic life to be a happy one. Besides his own children he supported two nephews, a tutor, and several poor students from the university. In addition to these, many friends daily met under his hospitable roof and enjoyed meals with him. Strangers and visitors were never wanting.

Sympathy

Luther's sympathetic nature is shown in a very interesting little episode concerning a certain Johannes Frosch of the Carmelite Convent in Augsburg. This man entertained Luther at one time, and told him of the promise of the Elector to give him a doctor's degree and an honorary dinner for a certain service rendered. But Frederick had forgotten his promise. So Luther, busy as he was, took care of this man, arranged to give him his degree, and out of his own purse arranged an honorary dinner, so that this man, who had cherished fond hopes based on a long-forgotten promise, might not be disappointed.

1. Tulloch, pp. 157-158.

Luther was especially well liked by the students of the university, and the "affectionate confidence of young men in the cause of the Reformation and in himself greatly cheered Luther. His intrepidity, his fearlessness, the elevation of his aims, the decisive wholeness and heartiness of his purpose, views, words, his imaginative fire and rugged eloquence, his undeniable pugnacity and truly German sympathy with the joy of battle, these and not less than these his ardent friendliness, his genial gifts of familiarity, his love of lute music and of a good laugh, endeared him to ingenuous youth."[1] *Liked by Students*

That which appealed to all of the people who came into contact with Luther was his congeniality. Peter Mosellanus says of him, "In daily life and manners he is cultivated and affable, having nothing of the stoic and nothing supercilious about him; rather he plays the man at all seasons. He is a joker in society, vivacious and sure, always with a happy face no matter how hard his enemies press him. You would hardly believe that he was a man to do such things unless inspired by the gods."[2] In spite of multitudinous activities and incessant worries he still found time for recreation. His inborn vivacity, his enthusiasm, his interesting manner of conversation, his contagious humor, and his personal charm won for him warm admirers and sincere friends wherever he went. *Congeniality*

1. Bayne, I, p. 144.
2. Smith, Luther's Correspondence, I, p. 261.

In perfect harmony with the spirit of the Renaissance, which had penetrated Germany and had found such ardent followers there, Luther warmly appreciated and enjoyed nature. The sights and sounds of all about him touch him, "now with joy and now with pathetic aspiration. Of all the reformers, we see in him alone this elevated susceptibility to natural grandeur and beauty. In view of these, his poetic depth and richness of feeling come strongly into play. The flowers, the birds, the 'bounteous thunder shaking the earth and rousing it, that its fruits may come forth and spread a perfume;' the troubled sky, the dark and heaving clouds poised overhead, and guided by the swift and invisible hand of God; the quiet loveliness of the harvest fields on his return home from Leipzig; the little bird perching at sunset in his garden, and folding its wings trustfully under the care of the Almighty Father; the first song of the nightingale, all touch him with emotion and awaken his tender and solemn interest."[1] He was particularly fond of flowers, and on one occasion, when some violets were brought to him, he answered in these beautiful words, "What do we give God for these flowers? Reviling, evil, shame. This first summer flower is as blue as the sky. Neither the Grand Turk nor the Emperor could pay for them in all the world."[2]

Love for Nature

In addition to the natural endowments just discussed, the softness singled with strength, sadness with

1. Tulloch, p. 160.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 366.

humor and gentleness with power, a love for humanity and nature, we might include a brief discussion of the Reformer's oratorical gifts in particular.

Oratorical Gifts

In spite of his trepidation of seeing so many heads before him, as he once put it, Luther was by nature a public speaker. "Vivid imagination, picturesqueness of style, fluency of speech, personal magnetism, passionate earnestness and an uncommon knowledge of religious experience, all of these he had."[1]

Poetic Imagination

Besides the dynamic personality mentioned above, Luther had a keen, poetic imagination, a valuable asset to a pulpit orator. He was not only gifted with a "deep appreciation and life of feeling that constitute poetic sensibility, but moreover with that mastery of melodious expression which makes the fullness of the gift and faculty divine."[2] His love for man and nature, his love of music, his love for all that is high and good fills his sermons with an inspiration that grips the most apathetic hearer. It is well known that Goethe, Lessing, and Heine, as well as other great German authors "drank deep of the great river of his inspiration."[3] He also exerted a mighty influence upon foreign writers and poets. Carlyle says of him: "But in no books have I found a more robust, I will say noble, faculty of a man than in those of Luther. A rugged, honest homeliness, simplicity; a

1. McGiffert, p. 49.
2. Tulloch, p. 160.
3. Smith, Luther, p. 335.

rugged sterling sense and strength. He flashes out illumination from him; his smiting idiomatic phrases seem to cleave into the very secret of the matter. Good humor, too, nay tender affection, nobleness and depth; this man could have been a poet too."[1]

A Genius

No unbiased person will deny that Luther was a genius, and that his sermons show a fertility of intellect, a depth of mind that is found in but few of the writings of his contemporaries. "For only if we resolutely refuse to systematize his individual utterances, if we permit them to act upon ourselves wholly without qualification or dislocation, in the form in which he put them to paper, while still hot and glowing from joy and anger, do we gain a full impression of the inexhaustible power, fullness and originality of his intellect. . . . We do not claim too much when we assert that the Reformer's lack of system is a necessary outgrowth of his tremendous fertility and to that extent also a necessary prerequisite of his world-historical activity."[2] A man of ordinary mentality could never have written so profusely as did Luther. Smith says that "the Reformer was no organizer; he had not the gift of ordered presentation. This quality which he admired in Melanchthon and would have admired still more in Calvin, has sometimes been said to be usually lacking in Germans. These deep thinkers, patient searchers after

1. Smith, Luther, p. 335.
2. Boehmer, Luther, pp. 253-253.

truth, and poets have not the ability, so characteristic of the French, of presenting their thought in clear, systematic form. . . . The deepest thinking is not always the most systematized."[1]

Ability to Express Thoughts

In addition to the poetic imagination and intellectual fertility, Luther also had the ability to express himself rapidly and concisely. No sooner was a concept framed in his mind, than he had the proper words at his command. His hearers declared that his words were "half battles"; and Melanchthon "touched the source of this effectiveness when he said that Luther's words were not born on his lips but in his soul."[2] This is all the more remarkable because he himself practically had to formulate a new language so that all of his hearers and readers in Germany could understand him.

Extraordinary Memory

But Luther also had a very retentive memory, which was of inestimable value to him in his preaching. He practically knew the Bible from cover to cover, so that he could quote passages to substantiate any doctrine that might come to his mind, or give biblical examples for any case which he might wish to explain. Boehmer says that if we consider the "ease and dexterity with which he moved amidst the most abstract philosophical and theological distinctions, the rapidity with which he worked into not merely the theological but also the political, legal, social, and economic problems with which he was brought face to face by the

1. Smith, Luther, p. 334.
2. Pattison, p. 134.

progress of the Evangelical movement, and note how quickly and without effort he always found for his ideas a striking and original expression, how easily, thanks to his enormous memory, he retained in mind whatever he had read, seen, or heard, we will be forced to confess that, even regarded purely as an intellectual character, he was a phenomenon without equal."[1]

Culture and Education

Although Luther possessed all of these natural gifts which we have discussed thus far, we must not forget that he had also made a thorough preparation for the work he was undertaking. He was a man of culture and education, who, by means of his genius, his careful training, and his conscientious and thorough work had won for himself a rank among the greatest men of his day. Among his contemporaries only Erasmus and Melanchthon can be compared with him. Although these two men far surpass him in the knowledge of the classics, no one is his equal in the use of the German language.

Study of Hebrew

Luther applied himself very diligently to the study of Hebrew, primarily, of course, in order to enable him to translate the Old Testament. It is very well known how assiduously he worked and searched for the exact meanings of the Hebrew words. It is also very interesting to note that he sided with Reuchlin, the greatest Hebrew scholar of the day, in the latter's controversy with Pfefferkorn, the converted Jew who

1. Boehmer, Luther, p. 183.

attempted to have the Hebrew Bible and all Hebrew writings in Germany burned. Smith says that, "like all natures with an abnormally developed religious faculty, he found his spiritual ancestry rather in Judea than in Greece, even preferring the literature of the Hebrews, an opinion in support of which the great English poet-scholar Milton has elaborately argued in 'Paradise Regained.' 'Compared to the wisdom of the Hebrews,' says the German professor, 'that of the Greeks is simply animal, for there can be no true wisdom without knowledge of the true God.' "[1]

Greek

The writings of Luther show that he knew some Greek, but it is generally thought that he did not master it well enough "to enjoy the classical authors of that tongue, in which respect he was exactly on the par with the most famous humanists of the Italian Renaissance. True, he 'bought a Homer to become a Greek,' and a few quotations show that he really had studied it, but occasional references to other authors, such as Demosthenes and Aristophanes, seem to have behind them little more than literary commonplace."[2] We know that as a student he had studied the works of Aristotle very diligently,[3] although he undoubtedly used the current Latin translations and commentaries of his day.

In the Latin authors, however, Luther was much better versed, both as to style and contents. He was

1. Smith, Luther, p. 341.
2. Ibid, p. 342.
3. Hyma, Luther's Theological Development, p. 5.

well acquainted with Virgil, Ovid, Terence, Plautus, Cicero, Livy, Seneca, Horace, Juvenal, Suetonius, Sallust, Scipio, Quintilian, and Tacitus. He was especially pleased with the works of Plautus and Virgil, and could recite whole passages from either at will.[1] He also praised Cicero. "Cicero is the best philosopher," he once said, "for he felt that the soul is immortal. He wrote best on natural, moral, and rational philosophy. He is a valuable man, reading with judgment and able to express himself well. He wrote in earnest and did not fool like the Greeks, Plato and Aristotle. I hope God will forgive such men as Cicero their sins. Even if he should not be redeemed, he will enjoy the situation in hell several degrees higher than that destined for our cardinal of Mayence."[2] Luther himself had developed a fairly good Latin style, and was not incapable of a certain refinement, although he invariably excuses his "barbarian" Latinity when writing to noted humanists. "He always wrote, indeed, with correctness, and though he lacks the labored and often pedantic Ciceronian style, so carefully cultivated by the scholars of the Renaissance, he more than makes up for this deficiency by the freshness and force of his Latin, which he treats as if it were a living language."[3]

Latin

As has been mentioned before, Luther has no equals among his contemporaries as a linguist in the

1. Broemel, p. 93.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 323.
3. Ibid.

study and application of the vernacular. He is considered one of the founders of the modern German language, and his translation of the entire Bible into the German will always stand out as a literary masterpiece. He has a ready vocabulary and an excellent sentence structure. The general impression one receives from a careful reading of his works in the original is one of strength, frankness, and simplicity, qualities which correspond with those of the author. One fault, however, may be pointed out, namely his verbosity. He himself admits that he was unable to be as concise and perspicuous as Melanchthon and Amsdorf. "I am garrulous and rhetorical," he said at one time. "Formerly I almost talked the world to death. Then I could say more about a feather than now about a farm, and yet I do not like verbosity."[1] But still, this does not deprive Luther of the honor of being the "first great German man of letters."[2]

German

In treating of Luther as a linguist, we must also bear in mind that he stands out as one of the foremost students of external as well as internal criticism of his day. "Even as an interpreter of Scriptures, however, Luther achieved a great deal more than is usually suspected. He is, if not the first, at least one of the first professors who in their work of expounding the Bible as a matter of principle followed the original text. Further, he as early as 1520, from principle tabooed all

Critical Ability

1. Smith, Luther, p. 334.
2. Boehmer, Luther, 210.

the ecclesiastical methods of interpretation and supplanted these falsely famous arts by 'natural, grammatical, and historical' exegesis. In his opinion it is not the Church which ought to determine what Scripture teaches, but the Word of God ought to fix the doctrine of the church. These are deeds which for all time assure him a place in the history of scholarship."[1] He seems to have developed this critical acumen at an early date. One need only take a cursory glance at his lectures on Romans, delivered in the University of Wittenberg in 1515 and 1516,[2] to see what a big advance he had made at that time over the ordinary exegesis of the day. As early as 1516 he mentions the Greek version of Laurentius Valla, the foremost external critic of the Italian Renaissance, in explaining Luke 2, 10.[3] It is also well known that he used the Greek edition of the New Testament as prepared by Erasmus in translating the Bible. "Even in the more minute interpretation, however, one is again and again astonished at the amount he was able to accomplish with his poor auxiliaries. We wonder also at his fine ear for the linguistic peculiarities of the text and marvel over the assurance with which he not only knew how to develop the religious ideas but also the theological concepts."[4]

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1. Boehmer, Luther, pp. 182-183.
2. Ellwein, Martin Luther, Vorlesung ueber den Roemerbrief.
3. Sermo die Resurrectione Domini habitus, Easter 1516. Weimar I, p. 53.
4. Boehmer, Luther, p. 183.

As we have intimated above, Luther was also a scholar of the foremost rank. He was well read in all of the literature available at that time, medieval and contemporary as well as classical. We have already mentioned his acquaintance with the ancient languages. In addition to this we might add that he was very extensively read particularly in the Latin Christian writers. He had studied the Scholastics, Peter Lombard and his "Sentences," Bernard of Clairvaux, Duns Scotus, Okkam, Gregory of Rimini, Pierre d'Ailly, Gerson, and Biel. He even knew d'Ailly and Biel almost from memory,[1] and quoted others so frequently and well at the Leipzig Debate, that no one could venture to say that his knowledge of the Scholastics was very limited. Of these Scholastics, however, Luther said, "I know and confess that I learned nothing from the scholastic theologians but ignorance of sin, righteousness, baptism, and the whole Christian life. Briefly, I not only learned nothing, but I learned only what I had to unlearn as contrary to the divine Scriptures."[2] But he had also studied other Latin Christian writers, Augustine, Iranaeus, Cyprian, Athanasius, Hilary, Ambrose, Gregory of Nanzianzus, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Anselm of Canterbury. Of these Augutine was his favorite, and he mentions him quite frequently, especially in his earlier sermons. For others, such as Jerome, he had little use. Of the humanistic theologians whom he enjoyed most of all,

Well Read

1. Boehmer, Luther, p. 180.
2. Hyma, Luther's Theological Development, p. 16.

we might mention Erasmus, Lefevre, and Pico della Mirandola.

Luther studied church history with considerable thoroughness and a great amount of independent judgment. His sermons show that he was familiar with the historians Eusebius and Cassioderus, as well as with the innumerable legends of the saints, "almost all of which he regarded with a justifiable suspicion. Sometimes he was biased by preconceived ideas, as when he convinced himself that the rise of papal power was to be dated only four centuries before himself, with the introduction of the Canon Law. With this great code he was thoroughly familiar."[1]

Church History

Of the more recent theologians, Luther was particularly interested in Tauler, Gerson, and Staupitz. After the Leipzig Debate he also learned to know John Huss of Bohemia better, and took a great interest in his writings. In 1536 he even edited a collection of the martyr's letters. Wycliffe of England is often mentioned by Luther, but it is generally thought that he knew no more of this forerunner of the Reformation than he had heard by report.

Later Theologians

The Reformer's correspondence shows that he was well acquainted with the literature of his contemporaries. We have already mentioned his knowledge of the works of Erasmus, especially of his edition of the New Testament. He often quotes and mentions the Dutch scholar's "Adages," the

1. Smith, Luther, p. 343.

"Catechism," the "Colloquies," the "Praise of Folly," and the "Ecclesiastae." "Other contemporaries were perused only less eagerly. More's 'Utopia' and 'Epigrams' were ordered at the Frankfort Fair of 1518. Lefevre d'Etaples was well known, and so were the 'Epistolae Obscurorum Virorum,' of which, however, Luther, like Erasmus, highly disapproved. The writings of Valla and Hutten each had their place in the Reformer's library. Later in life Luther developed a great fondness for the contemporary German fables,[1] plays, ballads and satires. . . . Indeed the most famous works of the time were satires. Erasmus' 'Praise of Folly,' Brant's 'Ship of Fools,' and the 'Letters of Obscure Men' attest the taste of Luther's contemporaries, a predilection which he also shared."[2]

Contemporary Literature

Luther also showed his culture by his taste for the fine arts, especially for music, of which he was a thorough master. His opinion of music as an art is shown in his letter to Lewis Senfel at Munich: "Although my name is so hated that I must fear, my dear Lewis, that this letter will not be safely received and read by you, yet my love of music has overcome my fear, and in musical talent I see that God has richly endowed you. It is this that makes me hope my letter will bring no danger to you, for who ever in Turkey would be

Music

1. Cf. Mathasius' sermon on this subject in Luthers Leben, pp. 107 ff.

2. Smith, Luther, p. 344.

offended at me for loving art and honoring an artist? Moreover I greatly honor and esteem your two Dukes of Bavaria, although they are not very favorable to me, because I see they love and foster music. I doubt that there are many seeds of virtue in a mind touched by music, and I consider these not affected by it as stocks and stones. We know that music is hateful and intolerable to devils. I really believe, nor am I ashamed to assert, that next to theology there is no art equal to music, for it is the only one, except theology, which can give a quiet and happy mind."[1] And in another place he says, "Singing is a fine noble exercise. It has nothing to do with the world or business troubles. He who sings drives out care, and that is an excellent thing."[2]

Other Arts

It is rather difficult to speak of Luther's appreciation of the other fine arts, although he mentions several paintings and works of sculpture that he had seen on his visit to Italy. That he was not blind to the merit of the plastic arts is shown by the following statement: "The Italian painters are so able and so full of genius that they can, in a masterly way, follow and exactly imitate nature in all their paintings; not only do they get the proper color and form in all the members, but they even make them appear as if they lived and moved. Flanders follows Italy and imitates her in some measure, for the men of the Low Country, especially the Flemish, are cunning and artful; they

1. Smith, Luther, pp. 346-347.
2. Ibid., p. 346.

quickly and easily learn a foreign language, for they have ready tongues."[1]

From this brief summary as to the education and culture of the Reformer, we can see that he was by no means a narrow-minded fanatic, a religious zealot who forgot himself and the world about him in his pious meditations. He was a man of culture and refinement as well as of erudition. And this is quite important in helping us to understand his immense popularity in the pulpit as well as at the dinner table with his friends and guests.

No Narrow Fanatic

We still have the spiritual qualities of the Reformer to consider. A preacher should be a manly character, present a good appearance, and be a learned and well read person; but all of these splendid assets are of no avail if those qualities and that attitude are missing which he is, by the nature of his calling, to encourage and inculcate among his constituency. Preaching one thing and practicing another is fatal.

Spiritual Qualities

To Luther, who had tried all the various means of earning peace of conscience by performing "good works," the Bible, the Gospel of Jesus, was the most precious treasure on earth, the source of his inspiration. To him it was the true Word of God, the instrument of the revelation of His holy will; the effectual means of the Holy Spirit to kindle faith and to sustain it, the only guiding norm and rule of his entire conduct.

Love for Scriptures

1. Smith, Luther, p. 349.

He placed a knowledge of the Bible above all other knowledge. He writes in 1522: "Nothing vexes me more than this multitude, which abandons Scripture, faith, and charity, and boasts that it is Christian only because in the presence of weaker brethren it is able to eat flesh on Fridays, commune in both kinds, and stop fasting and prayer. . . . But all things are to be proved by Scripture, and hearts are to be helped little by little like Jacob's sheep, that they may first receive the Word of their own accord and afterwards grow stronger."[1]

Man of Prayer

Luther was emphatically a man of prayer.[2] The more work he had before him, the longer and more earnestly he prayed; and his prayers were real, sincere "conversations with God." Among those of his prayers which have been handed down to us, the one most characteristic of the Reformer is the one which he prayed in his little chamber at Worms on the night before his appearance before the imperial diet. "God, God, O my God! come thou to my aid, and protect my cause and thine against the wisdom of the world. Grant me this prayer, which thou alone canst grant. It is thy cause, O my God, and not mine; it is not for me, but for thee to defend me against the great ones of the earth. It is thy cause, the cause of justice and of eternity. God of all time, come to my aid, that aid which none among men can afford me. Flesh is flesh; man a

1. Smith, Luther, pp. 149-150.

2. One of Luther's favorite sayings was, "Bene orasse est bene studuisse.'

poor weak, failing, faltering creature. O my God, hast thou not ears? Dost thou not hear me? Art thou dead? No, thou canst not die. Then, O my God, aid me in the name of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my strength and my help, my citadel and my rampart. Where art thou, O my God, where art thou? Come, come! I am ready to give up my life as 'twere a lamb. It is the cause of justice; it is thy cause, and I will not separate myself from thee. The world can not prevail, and were it given up to even a greater legion of devils, even though the work of my hands were to give way and the earth open its abysses before me, I remain firm: my soul is thine, and is thine, and with thee to all eternity. Amen. O my God, aid me. Amen."[1]

Spiritual Experience

Almost as great an asset as his sincere prayerfulness was Luther's spiritual experience, and in connection with this, his ability to talk from the heart to the heart. Whatever agonies of soul his hearers might be suffering, the preacher's agonies had been still greater; no matter how depressing the pangs of their conscience, his had brought him to the brink of despair. He had worked so strenuously and gone through the monastic requirements so meticulously that he was about to give up all hope of winning the favor and forgiveness of the "wrathful," exacting, just God. To him justice had meant only punishment. But what a change had come over him when he had finally found and entered

1. Michelet, Life of Luther, p. 81.
2. Cf. Boehmer, Der Junge Luther, pp. 110-111.

the "new paradise!"[1] And he was able to compare the experiences and trouble of those who came to him for help with his own, and then happily to lead them through the same portals of paradise. When anyone would come to him and complain that it was hard for them to believe, he told them how much harder it had been for him to believe, and that even now he had to pray to God daily so that He would strengthen his faith.

Desire for Worship

One more point may be discussed in considering the preacher's spiritual assets; one which is very closely related to what we have stated above. This was his great desire for devotional services, for hearing and preaching the Word of God. When no pulpit was open to him he would preach sermons at his home to the members of his own household. It is well known how he enjoyed singing hymns with his children and accompanying them with the lute, particularly at Christmas time. The man who sang the Word of God, talked about it in the lecture room and with his friends, saw its power in nature, felt it permeate his entire being and dominate his entire life, certainly was preeminently fitted to be the preacher of the Reformation, and a preacher who could well rank among the foremost pulpit orators of all times.

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1. Cf. Boehmer, Der Junge Luther, pp. 110-111.

CHAPTER II

THE PREACHER'S AUDIENCE AND PROBLEMS

In order to understand the tremendous success of Luther as a preacher and a reformer, we must know something of the character of the audiences whom he addressed and of the people in general who followed his leadership. There seems to be a tendency to put too much stress upon the fact that the state of German life at the beginning of the sixteenth century was corrupt morally and spiritually; that a great leader and reformer was needed to stem the tide and to lead the people back to lives of piety and a search for truth. Too little is said of the general search for truth among the conscientious of all classes, and their finding the embodiment of this search in Martin Luther, a leader who had risen from their ranks.

General Conditions

As a matter of fact, there was no time in the life of the German Empire in which the people as a whole were more pious and religiously inclined. They were not seeking only "worldly enjoyment," but were extremely solicitous concerning their spiritual welfare. Aleander, the papal nuncio to Germany, reports in 1520 that the German people previous to the advent

Piety of the German People

of Luther had been more obedient to the pope than any other nation of Christians. This is shown by their attitude toward the established religion of their age. They bought indulgences, went on pilgrimages, collected and worshiped relics, and built monasteries and places of worship in great numbers. In Cologne, for example, there were at this time eleven great churches, nineteen parish churches, twenty-two monasteries, twelve hospitals, and seventy-six convents. More than one thousand masses were said there daily.[1] Such a condition prevailed throughout Germany. The trouble with the people was not that they were not searching for truth, but that they were being misled by the leaders of Catholicism.

Age of Superstition

It must also be remembered that this was an age of gross superstition. Nearly every one believed in magic and supernatural powers. Educated men talked about monstrous giants and little dwarfs, fairies and dragons, and believed that all Germany was infested with witches. In fact, Pope Innocent had, in 1484, declared Germany to be full of witches. Then we must also bear in mind that astrology and alchemy were zealously studied by some of the most intelligent men of the day. Luther on one occasion makes sport of Melanchthon's favorite hobby, astrology. This mention of the superstition of the age has a bearing upon our subject in this respect, that the Roman ecclesiastical system took advantage of this weakness of its constituents, particularly in Germany, to such an

1. Lindsay, p. 116.

extent that the people soon began to realize the absurdity of their religious practices. Their credulity, as well as their tendency to render unquestioned obedience to the "powers that be," had been imposed upon. The more alert among them soon found that they were being exploited by the upper classes, the rulers, and also by the church, both at Rome and in their own country, and were not long in beginning an agitation and discontent that was profoundly to affect the religious life of the entire world.

By the time that Luther enters on the scene, therefore, we find the people throughout Germany in a general state of unrest and discontent. The peasants were virtually bound to the soil as serfs, and their condition was becoming gradually worse. They began to look upon the luxury and gluttony of their rulers and also upon the introduction of the Roman Law in place of their Germanic Laws as the source of all their misery, and were beginning to take aggressive action in seeking relief. Their discontent in religious affairs was made still worse by the fact that their attention was constantly being called to the widespread corruption of the Catholic Church.

General Discontent

The evil character of the popes of this period is quite well known. This envied position was usually obtained by political manipulation, and was invariably used for personal and family aggrandisement. Paul II was one of the most vain popes that ever ruled from the papal throne. The worldly Pope Sixtus IV made an

Corruption of the Papacy

attempt to secularize the papacy and make it hereditary. Innocent VIII filled the Vatican with his sons and daughters. Innumerable murders are laid to the charge of Alexander Borgia. Julius II took his name from his hero, Julius Cæsar, and imitated him by taking the field in person. Leo X openly expressed his intention of enjoying the papacy and the lucrative benefits obtained from the use of what he called the "fable of Christ." To him a rare painting or a newly discovered manuscript was of much more worth than true, sincere piety.[1] It is no wonder that the better informed among the Germans began to criticize this flagrant corruption in the "Holy City," and to bring the actual state of affairs before the attention of the people.

Corruption of the German Clergy

The people in Germany had become directly acquainted with the character of their own clergy at home. Their cardinals often went to masked balls and took part in the dances. They were not too blind to see that the bishops were making wars and were using the ban and interdict for their own personal advantages. Many of the higher clergy very seldom, if ever, took a part in the services. Archbishop Gunther of Magdeburg read his first mass in the thirty-fifth year of his pontificate, while Robert of Strassburg never read one at all.[2] Many of the lower clergy were paying blackmail to their superiors for evading the law of celibacy, and in turn took their share of the profits

1. Henderson, I, pp. 239-240.
2. Ibid., pp. 240 ff.

made by the wine shops and gambling resorts. "The monks of Leubus refused to hold masses for the dead unless the abbot would give them daily a measure of beer as good as that which he drank himself. . . . We hear of cathedral chapters so aristocratic that candidates for membership had to show at least thirty-two noble ancestors; we hear of men who held as many as twenty-four ecclesiastical livings without occupying or performing the duties of any."[1] The nunneries, on the other hand, were in all too many cases mere "temples of frivolity." These are facts which the ingenuous Denifle[2] overlooks when he says that the clergy at the beginning of the Reformation were generally pious.

Closely allied with this general corruption among the clergy was the mercenary spirit of Rome. The papal curia used all available means for extracting money from Germany in order to fill its own coffers and add to its own splendor. The buying and worshiping of relics and going on pilgrimages to the "Holy City" were constantly encouraged. Bishops-elect were compelled to pay thousands of guldens in order to be confirmed in their petitions, and thousands more for the pallium. The lower clergy were compelled to pay annates, which regularly amounted to a half of their income for the first year of service.

Mercenary Spirit

An outstanding example of this mercenary spirit is the practice of selling indulgences as it was carried

1. Henderson, p. 241.
2. Denifle, Luther und Lutherthum, II, pp. 23-27.

on particularly at the time of Luther. The indulgence traffic was based upon the Catholic penitential system which originated early in the history of the Christian Church. This demanded repentence, confession to the priest, and the performance of good works for sins committed after baptism. If not enough good works of penance were done before death they were to be continued in purgatory until the entire debt was discharged. During the Middle Ages the substitution of other forms of penance besides fasting, almsgiving, and going on pilgrimages was permitted, and this permission came to be called an indulgence. Its use became very popular during the Crusades, when many were given the same indulgence as the soldier of the cross simply for sending substitutes or for helping finance expeditions. After the Crusades this granting of indulgences for monetary considerations continued. In the thirteenth century one of the scholastics worked out a doctrinal basis for this practice. He argued that Christ, Mary, and the other saints had by their sinless lives laid up an immense store of merits which were given to the church, and to which the successors of St. Peter had the keys. Theoretically these indulgences were to be valid only for the temporal satisfaction required of the penitent here on earth or in purgatory. But this was not always kept in mind, and people soon began to have the notion that an indulgence released them from all the results of their sins.

Indulgence Traffic

It was the abuse of this theory of indulgence with the end in view of obtaining money for selfish

ends that particularly enraged Luther and many other sincere Catholics. This abuse was best exemplified by the cunning work of the Archbishop of Mayence and his chief agent, Johann Tetzel. A brief quotation from one of his sermons will show how he worked upon the emotions of his hearers and used their ignorance concerning indulgences to his advantage. "Do you not hear your dead parents crying out, 'Have mercy upon us? We are in sore pain and you can set us free for a mere pittance. We have born you, we have trained and educated you, we have left you all our property, and you are so hard-hearted and cruel, that you leave us to roast in the flames when you could so easily release us.' "[1]

Johann Tetzel

At this place we might well consider the type of sermons which Luther's audiences had been accustomed to hear. In general we can say that the majority of people heard only such sermons as upheld the corrupt practices of the church and which furthered the superstition of the people. "The Virgin as the true queen of heaven and the source of salvation, the invocation of the saints without whose mediation no man can approach God, priests and popery which only has the power to forgive the sins of the living, and rescue the dead from purgatory, indulgence without which there is no eternal life, the sanctity of cloister life with its three vows of celibacy, absolute poverty, and perfect obedience, meritorious works that supple-

The Average Sermon of the Time

1. McGiffert, p. 81.

ment the redemptive work of Christ, etc., were the absorbing themes for the preachers."[1] The people were very often amused by legends of the saints and funny stories. Dr. Reu, a well read student of Luther and the Reformation, has taken the trouble to go to the original sources in Germany in order to procure an example of what was called a "model sermon," preached at Erfurt at the time of the Reformation.

The "Model Sermon"

This "model sermon" attempts to "discuss the subject 'How Mary in her humility drew God from Heaven, took the three cloister vows for all monks and nuns, founded all convents, and instituted the entire Christian faith.' And then the preacher narrated how Mary, who grew up in the temple, never wished and prayed for anything with more yearning and more ardor than for the birth of the Savior, and how she, in order to serve Him without hindrance during her entire life, solemnly vowed eternal virginity, absolute poverty and unreserved obedience. Finally her yearning is fulfilled. On account of her humility she herself was ordained from all eternity to be the mother of the Savior. But how was this possible? Has she not vowed to remain a virgin all her life? In order to solve this problem the preacher tells of the following conversation which took place from eternity between the three persons of the Holy Trinity, 'God the Father says to the Son and the Holy Ghost: "What shall we do with this maiden? In order the

1. Reu, Doctor Martin Luther, pp. 211-212.

better and more devoutly to serve Us, she has vowed virginity, poverty and obedience. But we have ordained from all eternity that she shall be the mother of Our Son, and this seems to be a contradiction, to be a true mother and yet remain a virgin." And then the Spirit answered, "That ought to cause Us no difficulty. She herself has taught Us what We should do, when so often she reminded Us of Our Omnipotence. We will apply this. Then she can cling to her determination, and We to Our resolution." Then spake the Son, "That is the best counsel. But one thing I ask of her, since I am to be born of her and through my bitter suffering and death redeem the world, namely, that her prayer concerning these three vows be heard not only as it concerns her, but also concerning all others who take upon them the same vows. They, too, shall live in voluntary celibacy. And in honor of her there shall be cloisters at suitable places, in which persons of the same resolution are admitted, to imitate her to the end of the world." Then answered the dearest Father, "My Son, Thy will be done, for Thy will is the same as Mine." And the Holy Ghost spoke in like manner. Thus the humility of Mary drew the Son of God down from heaven, and through her own example she caused the Son of God, even before His birth, to indicate the way of the cloister as the true way of salvation.' "[1] It is quite obvious that the more

1. Reu, pp. 210-212. Sermon delivered by Jenser von der Paltz; found in his Collection of sermons: Supplementum Coelifodinae, Lipsiae 1516, Blatt Hij ff.

intelligent people who were compelled to listen to such foolishness from day to day would desire and welcome a radical change.

There had been various movements toward reform in Germany before Luther's appearance on the scene, and each one of these contributed its share toward preparing his audience for him. The latter part of the sixteenth century had witnessed a widespread religious revival, the characteristic feature of which was to make pilgrimages to favorite shrines. Although too much emphasis was placed upon the miraculous, this movement showed that the people were pious, and caused many to turn against the corrupt practices of the church. There was another movement during this period, which also took place within the church, namely the resuscitation of the mendicant orders. A third religious movement was of a non-ecclesiastical type, and had a very great influence upon the people with whom Luther came into contact. It consisted in a silent spread of a quiet, unassuming, sincere religion which seemed destined to replace the arid formulism of the Catholic Church. Its vitality can be seen in the fact that individuals and corporations throughout Germany were founding eleemosynary institutions in order to care for the destitute, the sick, and the helpless. As a matter of fact, Luther's own parents were taking an active part in this phase of religious life, and exhibited a piety which was apparently out of harmony with the general atmosphere of the time. It is this movement which explains the fact that Luther's father could be a devout gentleman, and

Movements Toward Reform

still have very little use for the Catholic clergy. But this non-ecclesiastical movement was also apparent among the rulers of the various German states. The Councils of Constance and Basel had carefully prescribed a system of reforms, which were, however, promptly neglected by the Roman Curia. Consequently a good many of the German princes went ahead of their own accord to bring about a better religious condition among the laity as well as among the clergy in their own domains.[1]

The Brethren

One other very important type of religious life seems to have exercised a decided influence among a great part of the German people, especially among the better class of artisans.[2] This type was represented by men who commonly called themselves "Brethren." The most of them, it seems, did not take an active part in the orthodox church, but on the contrary, criticized it very strongly. They were "heretical" enough to have their Bibles printed and used in the vernacular; they professed a simple evangelical creed; they educated their children in their own schools; they conducted their religious services in the language of the people. When Luther was only thirteen years old he was sent to one of the schools of the "Brethren" at Magdeburg.[3] This particular branch of the "Brethren" was known as the "Brethren of the Common Life." It is interesting to note that these people also conducted "schools" for

1. Lindsay, pp. 139-142.
2. Henderson, pp. 152-156.
3. Smith, Luther, pp. 3-4.

the adults. The people would assemble at regular meeting places and would there be given a chance to ask questions on the various religious problems that interested them. There is no doubt but that such a practice gave a great stimulus among many people to demand a reform.

There was also a general attempt at reform in the art of preaching, and a good many sermons of this period are not to be classed with the "model sermon" quoted above. There were many manuals on pastoral theology printed and circulated throughout Germany, the most famous of which was the "Dormi Securi."[1] It describes the more important parts of the service; it shows what constitutes a good sermon; it gives lessons for the Sunday services; it gives the chief articles of the Christian faith and adds directions for pastoral work and the care of souls (Seelsorge). Although nearly all of the preaching was taken from the scholastic theology and was treated in an artificial and technical way, there was still some which was edifying and deservedly popular. One of the best known preachers in the period just preceding the Reformation was Geiler of Kaisersberg, a friend of Sebastian Brand and a member of the Humanistic circle at Strassburg. His sermons were full of exhortations to piety and correct living, and the preacher lacked altogether the vices and superstitions of his time. He denounced the corruption among the clergy, the evil lives in the monasteries and convents, relic

Reform in Preaching

1. Lindsay, p. 117.

worship, pilgrimages, buying indulgences, and practically all of the gross abuses and superstitious practices of the time which Luther later assailed.

We might well wonder why all of these reform movements, begun before the time of Luther, and also those contemporary with his activity, failed to rally a generally dissatisfied and discontented people to a common cause, a thoroughgoing reformation. These movements did not lack in emotional appeal; they did not fail to take into account the abuses in the church and the corruptions of the clergy; they did not lack the leaders. There was a Savonarola in Italy, the most powerful and effective preacher in his country; there was a John Colet at Oxford in England, who had denounced the evils of the clergy in no less certain terms than Luther did at Leitzkau in the same year,[1] 1512; there was an Erasmus of Rotterdam, an acknowledged prince of Christian learning, who bitterly attacked the evils of the day,[2] and seemed to be a possible leader of a reformation; there were men like Buddaeus and Lefevre in France; Johann Staupitz, Cochlaeus, Thomas Murner, Jerome Emser, Conrad Mutianus, and George Spalatin in Germany; there have been celebrated Mystics, like Meister Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, and Gerson. These were nearly all men of character, scholarship, and genius, and still they, together with other agitators and preachers of reform, only prepared the way for the greatest of

These Reform Movements Fail

1. Weimar I, pp. 8-17.
2. Lindsay, 172 ff.

all leaders and preachers, Martin Luther. These men had sensed the evils of their time, had attacked the prevalent degeneracy of morals, and had admonished the people to lead better Christian lives. But they had utterly failed in this, that they did not move the hearts of the people to their depths, nor awaken them to a completely new religious life. It seems that they had completely neglected the foundation of all earnest religious life, namely faith. They had failed to emphasize the foundation of all Christianity, the Gospel. As we have mentioned above, creditable sermons had been preached before Luther had ever entered the pulpit; but all of them lacked the one character absolutely essential to all effective preaching, namely the evangelical quality. Luther himself complains that he had heard many sermons on the sins of his age, but that he had never heard one which was evangelical, which lifted Christ and His death on the cross above everything else, and in which faith and love were the outstanding theme.[1]

Luther Successful

Bearing this in mind, we need not go far to find reasons for Luther's tremendous success as a leader of the Reformation. The Humanists had supplied teachers and preachers, but the age needed a prophet and received one. Although Luther was a child of the times, he nevertheless stood between his audiences and a new era, looking ahead to a broader search for truth. He was a "man of the people; bone of their bone,

1. Buchwald, Luthers Predigten, I, p. 14.

and flesh of their flesh; one who had himself lived that popular religious life with all the thoroughness of a strong, earnest nature, who had sounded all its depths and tested its capacities, and gained in the end no relief for his burdened conscience; who had at last found his way into the presence of God, and who knew, by his own personal experience, that the living God was accessible to every Christian. He had won the freedom of a Christian man, and had reached through faith a joy in living far deeper than that which Humanism boasted. He became a leader of men, because his joyous faith made him a hero by delivering him from all fear of Church or of clergy, the fear which had weighed down the consciences of men for generations. Men could see what faith was when they looked at Luther."[1]

Luther's audiences could see that he was the embodiment of that personal piety for which they had striven in vain. Whether in the convent, in the pulpit, in the lecture room or in the company of friends, every one recognized him as the model of piety. We are told that Albert Duerer, the famous artist of Nuremberg, practically worshipped the Reformer, although he had never seen him. This goes to show in what high esteem he was generally held by his fellow men. Such a man they would gladly follow, regardless of the decrees of the pope, of the church councils, or of the emperor.

Embodiment of Piety

Another reason for Luther's great success was

1. Lindsay, pp. 190-191.

the fact that he himself was led to adopt his reformational ideas gradually, so that his audiences could follow him step by step. Had he made any startling, radical innovations, his followers might have left him. But he progressed conservatively, beginning with ideas which all sincere Christians of his day held, and then, by his own precept and example, leading these ideas to their ultimate conclusions. This deliberate, gradual evolution of his own religious life and doctrines gathered to his cause not only the learned and cultivated classes, but also the common people, from whose ranks he had risen. Furthermore, he emancipated all of his countrymen who followed him in his development from the fear of the Church and the clergy. This was absolutely essential for a thorough renovation of the Church and a change of the moral conduct of the clergy. It is because Luther had freed himself from this dread, which had previously precluded any change in the religious life, and because the people saw that he was free from this fear, that made him a hero to all. "Hence it is that we may say without exaggeration that the Reformation was embodied in Martin Luther, that it lived in him as in no one else, and that its inner religious history may be best studied in the record of his spiritual experience and in the growth of his religious convictions."[1]

Gradual Development

As a preacher Luther gave his audiences throughout Germany that which the Catholic leaders before him had actually taken from them, namely faith

1. Lindsay, p. 193.

and the Gospel of Christ.[1] Christ and His redemptive work had been entirely obscured and obliterated by the legends of the saints, by redemption through the use of money, and by the general doctrine of extolling "good works." He went further than the reformers before him in that he not only destroyed the confidence of the people in the existing order of religious affairs, but in that he also attacked the root of the entire matter and gave them something positive in its stead. He shattered the entire structure of religion by formula and led his people back to a simple faith resembling that of the early church. It is this which constitutes the ultimate basis of his success as a preacher. He is the first man to restore the evangelical sermon to the Christian church, and for this reason alone should be accorded a position of first rank among the preachers of all time.

Restores Evangelical Sermon

Having given a brief sketch of the Reformer's audience and his problems, it is in place to consider how he treats his audience and the problems which confront him. As soon as the task of preaching fell to the lot of Martin Luther, he began to study the character of the people whom he addressed, and to seek ways in which to better them and their conditions. Whenever a new situation arose and a grave problem presented itself, the preacher had a solution and took a definite, decisive attitude toward it.

The Preacher and His Problems

Countless numbers of Luther's sermons show

1. Buchwald, Luthers Predigten, I, p. 14.

how uncompromisingly he attacked the corrupt practices of the clergy. It is interesting to note that the very first sermon that we have from Luther's pen, preached at a conference at Leitzkau in 1512,[1] was aimed at the priests. "O grief," he laments, "how hardened and foolishly secure the bishops of today are, so that they are not only silent (about the Word of God), but that they call that learned preaching which they, with puffed out cheeks blow out at the people (spiraverint), without even considering whether what they say is the Word of truth which is born of God (1 John 5, 4) or not. . . . They are not concerned about a proper treatment of the Word of truth, and are certainly to be counted among the wolves and not among the shepherds, among the little gods and not among the bishops. . . . A bishop must be a messenger of God. . . . Put away all foolish fables and concern yourselves with the pure Gospel, and teach the people the Word of truth with all respect. Put away all the teachings of man, and direct the thoughts of the people to the birth (of Christ) from God."[2] In another sermon of this early period, which he preached at the triennial convention of the Augustinian order at Gotha in May, 1515, he again attacks a common vice among the clergy, namely, that of slander.[3] It is characteristic of the young Luther

Corruption of the Clergy

1. Written by Luther for the Prior at Leitzkau. Weimar I, 8-17.

2. Translated from the Latin. Weimar I, p. 13.

3. Detractio.

that he passes up this splendid opportunity of showing his ability and learning, and preaches a thoroughly practical sermon on a prevailing evil of the time. Although he delivered this sermon in Latin, he makes use of the vernacular in order to give strong enough terms to slanderers. "Sunt enim vergifftete Schlangen, Verraether, Verloffer, Moerder, Diebe, Stroeter, Tyrannen, Teuffel und alles Unglueck, verzweiffelt, unglaeubig, Neidhardt und Hasser."[1] This sermon attracted wide attention and gained the favorable notice of Rufus Mutianus, one of the leading humanists of the day. It was at this convention that Luther was appointed district-vicar. A cursory glance at Luther's lectures on Romans during this same period[2] will show what Luther thought of the conditions of his times. He denounced the priests and laymen alike, the higher and lower ecclesiastics, the extortions of the Roman Curia, and the morals of the city of Rome.[3] In 1516, when he learned that Frederick was thinking of having Staupitz made a bishop, Luther wrote to Spalatin, urging him to use his influence against this plan, arguing that the vicar-general was too good a man for that position.

Luther also began to denounce the corrupt practices of the papacy very early in his preaching career, especially after the bull of excommunication had been issued by Leo X. In his early sermons, from 1514-

1. Weimar I, p. 44.

2. Ellwein, Martin Luther, Vorlesung ueber den Roemerbrief. 1515-1516.

3. Hyma, Luther's Theological Development, pp. 22-23.

1517, which show him in that gradual transition stage mentioned above, he already begins to doubt that the pope is the lineal successor of Peter. On August 1, 1516, he preaches, "Unless Christ had given all power to man, there would have been no perfect church, because there is no order where every one is free to say that he is enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Thus have the heretics done, as though every one had a right to set up his own principle, and as though there should be as many churches as there are heads. Therefore he has wished to exercise no power except that given by man to man so that he might gather all in one. The gates of hell will not prevail against this church, even though they do battle, so that it may be known that this power is from God and not from man. Therefore, those who withdraw themselves from this united and ordered power do nothing else but flatteringly deceive themselves in the fancy of illuminations and wondrous works, as our schismatics and conceited people do. It is better to obey just authority than to be the victims of fools, who do not know what they are doing."[1] It is to be noted that Luther does not in the least refer to the fact that the "office of the keys" was given to Peter alone in any other sense than to the other disciples and to the Church as a whole, nor does he say that the pope is the direct successor of Peter. His later sermons, of course, treat the pope very severely and he invariably calls him a tool of the devil, if not the devil himself, and

Corruption of the Papacy

1. Weimar 1, p. 69.

also brands him as the Antichrist. In a letter to Spalatin in 1519 he writes, "I don't know whether the pope is the Antichrist or simply his apostle, so greatly is the truth distorted in his decretals."[1] The next year he writes to Lang, "We are persuaded that the papacy is the seat of the Antichrist."[1]

The Reformer also touched upon the corruption of the morals as found in the people whom he addressed in his sermons. He complains especially about the German intemperate love for drinking. He says that the lives of a great number of people have developed into lives of swine, and that they have become so engrossed and steeped in sin, that all preaching and all exhorting is of no avail.[2] He shows that this life of sin is having such a dire effect upon the youth and especially the young women, that modesty is rapidly becoming a thing of the past.[3] Not only do the rulers and nobles engage excessively in such gluttony and drunkenness, but even the peasants are striving hard to outdo them. In addition to this sin of inebriety, Luther also points to the steadily increasing love for luxury among all classes. He says, however, that he does not belong to that group of saints and pietists who condemn a girl for going to a dance or wearing a red dress; that God could certainly stand it when people dress well. But he did maintain that the people should dress according to their means. Everyone, he says,

Corruption of the People

1. Hyma, p. 46.
2. Broemel, p. 109.
3. Cf. Mathesius, Luthers Leben, pp. 100 ff.

goes beyond his means in clothing, in giving sumptuous wedding feasts, in entertaining lavishly with parties at the various taverns, and in building homes far out of proportion to his income. He feels that this sin of luxury has reached a high point in history.[1] In one of his sermons he speaks of the filthy talk that was all too common in his day. "It (scandalous talk) is common in taverns and generally found as accompaniment of gluttony, drunkenness and gambling. . . . Similar are the tales commonly related by our women and maidens while spinning at the distaff, also those which knaves are fond of relating. Here belong also worldly songs which either relate lewd matters or turn upon slippery, frivolous themes. Such are 'The Priest of Kalenburg,' 'Dietrich of Berns,' and innumerable others."[2]

Superstitions of His People

In his sermons on the Ten Commandments, which he preached during the period of transition, 1514-1517, Luther takes the occasion to attack the prevalent superstitions in no uncertain terms. He treats in detail of astrology, witchcraft, saint worship, pilgrimages to favorite shrines, and the popular beliefs concerning lucky and unlucky days, omens, signs, and charms. Of course, he himself believed in witchcraft, as every one in his day did; but he spoke against the excesses to which the belief had carried many of his people. At first he did not condemn saint worship; but he

1. Broemel, p. 110.
2. Lenker VIII, pp. 154-155.
3. Weimar 1, 1-141.

did complain that it had developed into a mere scramble after temporal goods, whereas the true adoration of the saints, the aiming to attain their perfection and praising God for His gifts to them, had been almost entirely forgotten. "We honor them," he said, "and call upon them only when we have a pain in our legs or our head, or when our pockets are empty."[1]

He was very much opposed to the religion of form as was practiced universally throughout Germany, and complained that prayer and religion in general meant absolutely nothing to most of the people. "But at the present time," he says, "people pray only at stated times, count beads, and rattle off their prayers. Nobody thinks seriously of asking and obtaining something from God, but they only perform it as a duty obligatory upon them, and then are satisfied. As a thresher who wields his flail they move their tongue, and only earn bread for the body. Much less do they trouble themselves by serving God with their prayers and petitioning Him to relieve the general need of Christendom, but even the best among them believe that they have done enough when they are pious for themselves. Therefore, hypocrites as they are, they deserve nothing but hell with their prayers, for they serve neither God nor man, but only their body and advantage. If they wished to serve God and their neighbor as they ought, they would not think of the number of prayers and psalms they repeat, but with

Religion of Form

1. McGiffert, p. 72.

all their hearts would seek the honor of God and the salvation of men, which would be a true service of God."[1]

All of Luther's sermons show the fallacy of the doctrine of "good works." Those of his early years in the ministry are thoroughly evangelical, and show the natural wickedness of man, the nothingness of human merit, and the infinite preciousness and power of divine grace. A sermon which illustrates his position in this respect is that which he preached before Duke George at Dresden in the year 1516.[2] He spoke on the words of Christ to the disciples who had thought that they were fit to sit at the right and left hand of their enthroned Savior, "Ye know not what ye ask." As usual, the preacher showed man's spiritual impotence and God's omnipotent grace, and laid stress upon man's inability to purchase heaven by merit, the impossibility of his being able to save himself. One of the lady attendants at the court declared that, if she could hear but one more sermon like that, she could die with peace of conscience.[3]

Against "Good Works"

In the year 1516 the Reformer began to preach against the indulgence traffic, and it is interesting to note how his conviction that the traffic was wrong grew until it culminated in the nailing of the ninety-five theses on the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg, and in the writing

Against Indulgences

1. Lenker X, 298.
2. Weimar 1, p. 62
3. Peter Bayne I, p. 264.

and dissemination of his famous sermon on "Ablass und Gnade."[1] In his first sermon against indulgences, July 27, 1515,[2] he says, "In no instance do the commissioners and those selling (indulgences) preach anything else but that they extol indulgences and encourage people to give their money to them. But not one of them, so we hear, makes any attempt at explaining the indulgence to them; when it begins to take effect and when it ceases; but, indeed, they always make sure to explain how much the people are to pay, and they leave them under the impression that by means of the indulgence they have attained their salvation. But the indulgence has nothing whatsoever to do with the grace which makes one just. Furthermore, it is only the remission of the imposed penance and satisfaction. But it does not follow that this indulgence causes that person who obtains it to fly into heaven immediately after his death. . . . The majority of the people, however, are being deceived and believe that by means of the plenary indulgence all of their sins are forgiven. . . . The pope would be a gruesome person if he would not give those poor souls in purgatory that free of charge which he can give for a consideration of money. Beware that the indulgence does not make you slothful and careless, and lest it rob you of your inner grace."[3] In his sermon of October the 31st of the same year, when he preached at the

1. Weimar 1, pp. 243-246.
2. Ibid., 65 ff.
3. From the Latin. Weimar 1, pp. 65 ff.

dedication festival of the Castle Church, he again attacks the indulgence traffic, and with more vehemence than ever.[1] Here he explains that a person who is really sorry for his sins and wishes to repent does not want to cover up his sins with indulgences, but wants everyone to know what a sinner he has been and that he has determined to sin no more. He also goes into the matter of private confession and honestly admits, "De privata nescio ubi scriptura loquitur." He admonishes his hearers not to seek indulgences, which have no foundation in the Bible, but to seek the cross. In his sermon of February 1517, he says, "Nothing else is accomplished by the (sale of) indulgences than that the people learn to fear and to flee from the punishment of sins, but not from the sins themselves. Therefore no good results can be seen to come from these indulgences, only a false certainty and careless sinning. If men did not fear the consequences of sin, not a single one would desire an indulgence, even if they were given free of charge. The people should rather be taught to love the punishment and to embrace (amplectendam) the cross. Would that I were lying when I said, that indulgences rightly receive their name from the fact that they 'permit.' Indulgence means impunity, the permission to sin, and the freedom to lay aside the cross of Christ. If indulgences are to be given, they should only be given to those who are weak in faith, so that no one will take offense who wishes to attain meekness and lowliness of heart by taking up the cross, as the

1. Weimar, 1, pp. 94-99; 4, pp. 670-674.

Lord says (Matt. 11, 29). For Christ says that we shall find rest for our souls only by being meek and lowly, and not by buying indulgences. . . . What a great danger exists in our own times! O snoring priests! O what darkness, much worse than that of Egypt! How secure we are in the midst of these evils!"[1] In his sermon on "Ablass und Gnade," which went to the press and was circulated widely throughout Germany, Luther went into detail on all the features of the indulgence. He wrote this in German so that all of the people could read it. He concludes the last two parts of this sermon with these words: "If you speak in the following manner: I will never again purchase indulgences, then I shall answer: I have maintained that it is my sincere will, prayer, and advice that no one obtain indulgences; let the lazy and sleepy Christians buy them, you just go your own way. . . . If some people will call me a heretic, I shall not consider such nonsense seriously, for such people have beclouded brains and have never even stuck their noses into the Bible; much less do they understand what their teachers try to tell them. . . . If they did, then they ought to know that they should not accuse any person unheard and unconvinced. God give them and us good sense. Amen."[2]

Another example of Luther's dealing with the problems which confronted him is the series of eight sermons preached against the radicals at Wittenberg

1. From the Latin. Weimar 1, p. 141.
2. Ibid., 1, pp. 242-264.

from the 9th to the 16th of March, 1522.[1] He is so eager to quell the disturbances that he entirely ignores his own safety and the ban of the emperor, leaving his place of hiding at the Wartburg, and returns to Wittenberg to do what he considers his duty. He spent some time in finding out the actual state of affairs, and then plunged into a task of preaching with such a powerful effect, that the disturbance caused by the "prophets" was soon settled and the radicals driven out for good. In terse, expressive language, without any attempt at rhetorical effect, without even a text for his sermons, he proclaimed the inadmissibility of the use of violence in spreading the Gospel, and urged upon his hearers the duty of respecting those who were weak in faith, and who were by nature too slow in making the change from the old to the new. It was the Word of God that had been the dynamic force in the Reformation thus far, and Luther maintained that it would continue to work without the aid of man. In regard to the adiaphora, the unessential things, the regulative principle should be love and the method, freedom. If freedom is turned into command, all is lost. Let those monks and nuns who feel that they should not marry remain celibates; let those who do not care to eat eggs on Wednesdays and meat on Fridays abstain when they are so inclined. "Compel or force any one with power I will not, for faith must be gentle and unforced. Take an example by me. I opposed indulgences and all the

Against the Radicals at Wittenberg

1. Weimar, 10 III, pp. 1-64.

papists, but not with force; I only wrote, preached and used God's Word and nothing else. That Word, while I slept and drank beer with Melanchthon and Amsdorf, has broken the papacy more than any king or emperor ever broke it. Had I wished it I might have brought Germany to civil war. Yes, at Worms I might have started a game which would not have been safe for the Emperor, but it would have been a fool's game. So I did nothing, but only let the Word act."[1]

Other Problems

In the same manner Luther met all other problems which were of concern to him and his audiences. When the Peasants' Revolt broke out in 1524, he preached innumerable sermons, in Wittenberg and wherever he felt that he could do any good, attempting to restore order and peace. When the question of union with the Zwinglians came up, he preached about the Lord's Supper, and showed why it was impossible for him to come to an agreement with the Swiss Reformer. When the Turks threatened Vienna, he urged all of the Germans, Protestant and Catholic alike, to help the Emperor drive them back. During the Anabaptist rising at Muenster in 1534, he attacked their doctrines and practices. These examples all show that the great preacher of the Reformation always carefully considered his audience and the various problems that came up from time to time, and that he dealt with them in a practical manner.

1. Smith, Luther, p. 147.

CHAPTER III

THE PREACHER AND HIS HOMILETICS

It is indeed strange that Luther, who was by nature an orator, and who ultimately became one of the greatest preachers the world has ever known, did not at first have the least desire to enter the pulpit, but seems to have been entirely overcome by fear and an inferiority complex. He was ordained to the priesthood on May 2, 1507,[1] and when he was asked to preach before his brother monks, tried his utmost to avoid the responsibility. "Oh, how I trembled," he once told his friends, "when I was ascending the pulpit for the first time. I would fain have excused myself; but they made me preach. It was the regulation, that the junior brethren should preach to the rest."[2] On October 18, 1512, he was given the degree of Doctor of Theology at Wittenberg,[3] and one of the requirements of a doctor of theology was to preach. Later on in life he told a young student, whom he was encouraging to take up preaching, how he had argued with his vicar-general, but to no avail. "Here

Reluctance to Enter the Pulpit

1. De Wette, Luthers Briefe, I, p. 3.
2. Michelet, p. 292.
3. De Wette, I, p. 11.

under this very pear tree I have, over and over again, argued with Dr. Staupitz, as to whether it was my vocation to preach. He said it was. I had fifteen reasons against it, and fifteen more when they were done. 'Doctor,' I used to say, 'you want to kill me. I shall not live three months if you compel me to go on.' 'Our Lord,' the doctor would reply, 'our Lord required the aid of able men: he needs your services and must have them."[1]

However, Luther soon began to consider himself divinely appointed to preach, and began to take such an active interest in this phase of his activities, that he filled the pulpit almost incessantly up until the time of his death. He began his duties as a preacher in Wittenberg, in the small cloister church. In this "old dilapidated frame building, thirty by twenty feet in size, held together by props and daubed with clay, standing within the foundation of the walls of the new monastery that had been begun, but whose erection had been temporarily suspended, and from a pulpit constructed of rough boards, raised three feet above the ground, the greatest preacher of modern times preached his first sermon."[2] His courage grew, together with his love for the neglected Christians, and he was finally urged upon by the aged Simon Heinse of Brueck, the city pastor and brother to Dr. George Brueck, afterwards Chancellor of Saxony, to become assistant pastor at the city church. Later on in the same year, 1515, he

Begins Preaching

1. Michelet, p. 292.
2. Jacobs, p. 48.

received a regular call as preacher from the town council, and his duty was to "supply all otherwise unprovided-for appointments in that church."[1] He put much time and energy into this new responsibility, and never seems to have tired of preaching. On more than one occasion he preached as many as four sermons a day.[2]

Later Activity As Preacher

After the Reformation was well under way, there was a change made in the city church at Wittenberg. Dr. Johann Bugenhagen of Pomerania became the city pastor; but Luther still considered himself the vicar of the city pastor. Whenever Bugenhagen was away, which was often the case, since he was busy organizing Lutheran churches elsewhere, Luther would fill the pulpit as well as take care of all the other pastoral duties. It is hardly possible to conceive how the Reformer could find time for all of this extra work, especially since his health was rather poor after the sickness of 1527. Mathesius, a friend of Luther's and often among those whom Luther addressed at the dinner table, tells us, in his sermons on the Reformer's life, that in 1529 Luther preached from three to four times a week, and usually twice on holidays.[3] Although this preaching was almost too strenuous for him, although on one occasion he even fainted from overexertion in the pulpit,[4] he never

1. Jacobs, p. 49.
2. Nebe II, p. 1.
3. Mathesius, Luthers Leben, p. 123.
4. Nebe II, p. 5.

gave up. Even as an old man, tired of life and exhausted by his almost Herculean labors, when he was called to Eisleben to reconcile the counts of Mansfeld, he still dragged himself into the pulpit every Sunday. As long as there was still a breath of life in him, he felt that it was his divinely appointed duty to preach the Word of God. We are safe in saying that there was never a man who preached more diligently than Luther; that there is at least no preacher in the Middle Ages and in the beginning of the Modern Era who can even be compared with him.

After Luther had gained considerable experience in preaching and an enviable reputation as a pulpit orator, he felt it his duty to tell others about the qualities which go to make up an effective sermon. It was his earnest conviction that true Christianity could not be inculcated where there was lacking a correct preaching of the Word of God. He never wrote a work on homiletics, but his sermons, his Table Talks and his correspondence abound in advice on the art of preaching. In Luther's day little attention was given to sermon form, and only two works on the art of preaching were published by well-known contemporaries. Reuchlin's "liber congestorum de arte praedicandi" appeared in 1504, and Erasmus' "ecclesiastes sive concionator evangelicus" appeared in 1534. With Luther and his followers, Urbanus Regius, Brentz, Corvinus, Coelus, Veit Dietrich, Mathesius, and others, the main object of concern was always preaching God's Word, the art of sermonizing a

Luther and Homiletics

secondary matter. If Luther's sermons had been preached in the synthetical manner of a later age, in which form was so much emphasized that the Word of God was driven to the background, it is probable that they would never have made an appeal to the hearts of the people and kindled in them a new religious life. Although Luther's early sermons show an attempt to imitate the scholastic forms, he soon freed himself from any conventions as to the organization of material, and preached spontaneously and freely. True genius never allows itself to be shackled by form.

It is well known that Luther, in his "German Mass," emphasized the fact that the sermon is the most important part of the entire service. To him the oral, spoken word, as heard in the preaching of the Gospel, is of much more value than the written word, even more than the written word of the Scriptures. In one of his sermons he says that the "star of the East is nothing else than the new light, the oral and public preaching of the Gospel. . . . In the New Testament sermons must be preached orally, with living voices publicly, and that which formerly lay concealed in the letter and secret vision must be proclaimed in language to the ear. . . . We furthermore see that all the preaching of the apostles was nothing else than a presentation of the Scriptures upon which they built. Christ did not write his doctrines himself as Moses did, but he gave them orally, and commanded that they should be published abroad by preaching, and he did not command that they should

Sermon's Place in the Service

be written. Likewise the Apostles wrote very little, except Peter, Paul, John, Matthew and a few others. . . . Nor do we need any more New Testament books concerning Christian doctrine, but we need good, learned, spiritual, faithful preachers in every locality who without books can draw forth the living Word from the Old Scriptures and make it plain and simple to the people, just as the Apostles did; for previous to their writing they conferred with the people by word of mouth, which was strictly the apostolic and New Testament mode of evangelical work. . . . That there was a necessity of writing books was in itself a great detriment and denotes an infirmity of the human spirit and does not arise out of the nature of the New Testament. . . . If wishing did any good, one could wish for nothing better than that all books were simply destroyed and that nothing remained in the world except that which Christians formerly had, namely, the pure Scriptures alone, or the Bible. It contains more than is necessary of all kinds of art and doctrine which man ought to know, but wishing is now to no purpose; would to God there were only good books besides the Bible."[1] To Luther, therefore, the sermon was the strength and vitality of the Christian Church. It was the sermon that converted the souls to the Lord; it was the sermon alone that brought the church into being; the sermon alone should strengthen and preserve faith and love.

Luther summarizes his views as to the position

1. Lenker X, pp. 371-373.

of the preacher in the world of affairs in his sermon on "Urging the Parents to Send Their Children to School."[1] "The sermon daily teaches, converts, baptizes, brings souls to Christ, and saves them from many sins. Those who teach and preach (Dan. 12, 3) shall be as the stars in Heaven. They can comfort the distressed, give counsel to those who are in need of it, can put erring people on the right way, can help foster peace, and can accomplish a thousand different things. But in addition to serving man, the preacher also serves God. By his preaching he helps maintain the kingdom of God on this earth. He helps preserve the honor, name, and glory of God; the right faith and understanding in Christ and the fruits of His suffering and death; the gifts, works, and power of the Holy Spirit; the right and salutary use of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the true teaching of the Gospel, and so on. In addition to this he is also a great power against the devil, the world, false wisdom, and carnal pleasures. He is powerful in this work of preaching, because it is the work of God."

Position of the Preacher

Above all, preaching must be a free service to mankind. "My position, and that of every preacher and pastor, is not to be considered a lordship, a position that gives me power and prestige, but as one which above all demands that a particular service is to be rendered to all who are in need. I am obliged to teach you to become acquainted with God. I am to see to it

Preaching a Free Service

1. Lutherlesebuch, p. 354.

that you are baptized, that you hear the true Word of God, and that you are finally saved in heaven. But I am not concerned about governing and ruling you, for that is the duty of the princes and lords, the burgomasters and judges. My position, my sphere of duty, is only a service that I am to offer and to give free of charge to any person, regardless of his wealth or rank; but I am not to seek money or other possessions, honor or social preferment through my position as a servant of God."[1] It is contrary to human nature entirely to disregard all opportunities for personal aggrandizement, and this fact alone helps to show that a preacher's position is a difficult one. "If I were to write about the troubles and the burdens that a pastor must carry, as I myself have experienced them, I should discourage everyone who might be inclined to enter the ministry. For a pious, God-fearing preacher must bear in mind that nothing should be more dear to him than Christ, his Lord and Savior, and the future eternal life. He must feel that, although he loses his life and all of his earthly possessions, Christ will some day say to him: 'Come to me, you have been my dear, my faithful servant.' "[2]

Preacher's Task a Difficult One

The purpose of the sermon, of course, is to praise God and His wonderful works and to lead the people to Christ. In his sermon on the "Deaf and the Mute Man," Luther illustrates this point.

1. Erlangen 44, 220. In Buchwald, So Spricht Dr. Martin Luther, p. 229.

2. Erlangen 17, 132. Buchwald, p. 229.

"For by those who here bring the deaf mute to the Lord, the office of the ministry is meant. Ministers and the Apostles lead the poor consciences of men to God. This is done in three ways, by preaching, by a godly life, and by intercession. With the Word and preaching they are brought to God; a godly life serves to show the Word so much mightier in its power. But the Word itself leads to Christ, though it be preached by a sinner."[1] In another sermon he says, "Therefore this part also, namely the external word, or preaching, belongs to Christianity as a channel or means through which we attain unto the forgiveness of sins, or the righteousness of Christ, with which Christ reveals and offers us His grace or lays it in our bosom."[2] He goes on to show that if we could hear no sermons for one year, we should all be worse than any heathen. The goal of all preaching, then, is the honor of God and the betterment of our neighbors.

Purpose of the Sermon

Luther often laments the fact that the preachers of his day, instead of preaching the Word of God, bring their own doctrines and teachings into their sermons. On one occasion he calls attention to the fact that "the universities and monasteries with their teachings of free will and good works do nothing else but darken the truth of God so that we know not what Christ is, what we are, and what our condition is. They lead the whole world with them into the abyss of hell,

False Preaching

1. Lenker XIII, p. 379.
2. Ibid., XIV, p. 234.

and it is indeed time that we eradicate from the earth all chapters and monasteries."[1]

In his sermon on the Gospel for the first Sunday in Epiphany in the Church Postils, he shows that there are three outstanding teachings that have been brought into the pulpit, and which do not belong there.[2] "The first and coarsest is that of St. Thomas (if indeed he be a saint). This was taken from the system of pagan science and art which was written by that great light of nature, Aristotle. Now they say that this philosophy is like a bright shining plate, and the Word of Christ is like the sun. And the sun shines upon the plate, causing it to gleam and glitter all the brighter, so the divine light shines upon the light of nature and illumines it. With this beautiful simile they have introduced pagan doctrines into the Christian Church, which have been taught and cultivated by the great universities and in which teachers and preachers have been instructed. . . . Thus the Word of God is trodden under foot, for when it is given full play, it subverts all these satanic doctrines.

Preaching Aristotle

"In the second place, they have taught and prescribed human laws, called institutions and precepts of the holy Christian Church. Thereby these fools have thought to lead men to heaven and to be able to comfort and pacify our conscience. These human laws prevail to such a degree that like a deluge they cover the whole world

Preaching Human Laws

1. Lenker XIV, p. 224; X, p. 26.
2. Ibid., XI, pp. 24-26.

and have submerged everything else, so that it is almost impossible that any one may be saved from going down to hell. For they clamor as though they were insane: 'This has been decreed by the holy councils and that has been commanded by the church; we have observed this a long time, shall we not believe it now'?

"In the third place, besides these two theories they have also pointed us to the Holy Scriptures and said, that above every other doctrine the laws and decrees of the pope in matters of faith must be observed. But here they except the teaching of some of the holy fathers, who have interpreted the Scriptures, and whom they have exalted so highly that they place them on the same level with the pope at Rome, or a little above him, asserting even that they could not err, and clamoring, 'How could it be possible for the holy fathers not to understand the Scriptures'? But let these fools say what they wish, always remind them of the words of Christ, 'Know ye not that I must be in my Father's house'? We must above all things have the Word of God and cling to it, for Christ will be there and nowhere else."[1]

Preaching Laws of the Pope

Luther especially detested the legends of the saints and other foolish stories which the preachers told in order to amuse the people and to keep them awake. "For instance, on the festival of Easter, foolish, ridiculous stories have been introduced into the sermon to arouse the drowsy. And at the Christmas services the absurd

Use of Legends and Foolish Stories

1. Lenker VII, p. 155.

pantomime of rocking a babe, and silly declamations in rhyme, have found vogue. . . . In this category should also be classed the legends of the saints and the confused mass of lies concerning miracles, pilgrimages, masses, worship of saints, indulgences, and so on, which once dominated the pulpit. They are not just frivolous lies merely destructive of good morals, such as Paul refers to here, but they completely overthrow faith and the Word of God."[1]

From the above we may infer in a positive way, then, that the Scriptures are to be the foundation of the sermon, the ground in which every utterance is rooted, out of which the discourse arises and receives its nourishment. The Reformer shows that they contain all that a preacher might need in the way of stories and examples.[2] He knows what the people would like to hear, but he does not make their desires the criterion in his selection of material. He explains that the doctrines and teaching of the Bible are always to be preferred to stories. If stories are to be used, they must always bring out some doctrine or help make some teaching of the Bible clear. He complains that too many of the preachers think that they have done enough when they have brought their audiences to tears by stories such as Mary's weeping at the cross of Jesus. The account of Christ's suffering and death, for instance, is not enough in itself; but the people must be led to understand what this suffering

Scriptures the Foundation

1. Lenker VII, p. 155.
2. Nebe II, p. 17.

and death meant, and how they are to appropriate the benefits of such a death and resurrection.

The following utterances of Luther are his most characteristic statements concerning the relation of theology and the Bible: "A theologian should be thoroughly in possession of the basis and source of faith—that is to say, the Holy Scriptures. Armed with this knowledge it was that I confounded and silenced all my adversaries; for they seek not to fathom and understand the Scriptures; they run over them negligently and drowsily; they speak, they write, they teach, according to the suggestion of their heedless imagination. My counsel is, that we draw water from the true source and fountain, that is, that we diligently search the Scriptures. He who wholly possesses the text of the Bible is a consummate divine." Again he says, "Let us not lose the Bible, but with diligence and in fear and invocation of God, read and preach it. While that remains and flourishes, all prospers with the state; it is head and empress of all arts and faculties."[1]

Bible and Theology

Furthermore, the Reformer shows that in treating the Bible in the pulpit, both the Law and the Gospel should be used. "First, he (the preacher) must preach the Law so that the people may learn what great things God demands of us; of these we cannot perform any because of the impotence of our nature which has been corrupted in Adam's fall. Then comes the baptism

Law and Gospel

1. Table Talk, p. 3. Quoted from Dargan, History of Preaching.

in the Jordan. The cold water means the teaching of the Law, which does not kindle love but rather extinguishes it. For through the Law man learns how difficult and how impossible of fulfillment the Law is. . . . Therefore man must humble himself, and confess that he is lost and that all his works are sins, yea, that his whole life is sinful. . . . Furthermore, when the first teaching, that of the Law and baptism, are over and man, humiliated by the knowledge of himself, is forced to despair of himself and his powers; then begins the second part of John's teaching, in which he directs the people from himself to Christ and says, 'Behold the Lamb of God that takes upon Himself the sin of the world.' By this he means to say, 'First I have, by my teaching, made you all sinners, have condemned your works and told you to despair of yourselves. But in order that you may not also despair of God, behold, I will show you how to get rid of your sins and make yourselves pious through your works; another man is needed for this; nor can I do it; I can point him out, however. . . . This, then, is preaching and hearing the pure Gospel, and recognizing the finger of John, who points out to you Christ, the Lamb of God."[1]

Religious Experience

In order to be able to preach the Law and the Gospel, Luther says, the preacher must himself have experienced the power of God's Word and must understand it thoroughly.[2] Where this experience is missing on the part of

1. Lenker X, pp. 131-132.
2. Cf. Buchwald II, sermon 8.

the preacher, he will be unable to make himself understood to his audience. In his exegesis of Gen. 16, 12 he says that knowledge is of two kinds: knowledge of the substance (Sache) of a thing and the knowledge of the mere words.[1] A preacher must know and feel in his heart that which he is attempting to bring home to his people.

Use of Texts

Luther says that the preacher should pay particular attention to the texts on which he is to preach. Even though the text consists of but one sentence, it always contains a multitude of thoughts, and it is the preacher's duty to find out what they are, and which of them constitutes the outstanding thought, the theme. On this theme he is to dwell throughout his entire sermon.[2] He complains that the majority of preachers, if they mention the theme of the text at all, soon forget it and weave into their discourse all that they know.

Procedure

In his Table Talks Luther shows that a sermon must not be used alone as a means to show off oratorical ability. If the preacher wishes to use fine, adorned language, he must be sure that it accurately portrays the thoughts which he wishes to express, just as skilfully executed pictures portray objects exactly. A preacher must be a "dialecticus" and a "rhetor" at the same time. As a "dialecticus" he will supply the body of the sermon, and as a "rhetor" the ornamentation. He must above all be sure that he knows what he wishes to include

1. Nebe II, p. 22.
2. Ibid., p. 23.

in his sermon; then he must be able to define, describe, and portray the doctrines which he has decided to teach; in the third place he is to strengthen the doctrines by means of Scriptural quotations; then he is to clarify and demonstrate by means of apt illustrations, and finally he is to admonish and rebuke those who are indifferent and those who have adopted false religious notions.[1]

Above all, the preacher is to strive for simplicity and clearness. He says, "A preacher should bare his breast and give the simple folk milk, for every day a new need of first principles arises. He should be diligent with the catechism and serve out only milk, leaving the strong wine of high thoughts for private discussion with the wise. In my sermons I do not think of Bugenhagen, Jonas, and Melanchthon, for they know as much as I do, so I do not preach to them, but to my little Hans and Lena and Elsa. It would be a foolish gardener who would attend to one flower to the neglect of the great majority."[2]

Simplicity

He is strenuously opposed to the use of foreign words which are used merely to show off the learning and erudition of the preacher. Every sentence should be so constructed that even the most uneducated in the audience can understand what is being said. "Your sermons should be addressed not to princes and nobles, but to the rude, uncultivated commonality. If, in my

Use of Foreign Words

1. Nebe II, p. 24.
2. Smith, Luther, p. 331.

discourses, I were to be thinking about Melanchthon and the other doctors, I should do no good at all. But I preach in plain language to the plain, unlearned people, and that pleases all parties. If I know Greek, Hebrew, and the Latin languages, I reserve them for our learned meetings, where they are of use; for at these we deal with such subtleties and such profundities, that God Himself, I wot, must sometimes marvel at us."[1]

Although Luther insisted that a sermon should exhaust the text, he did insist upon brevity. He said that a good preacher stops when the people like to hear him the best, when they think that he is just beginning to talk. He considers it a bad sign, however, when the people can not wait until he concludes. Mathesius tells about a certain preacher whose gown was caught on a nail in the pulpit, and how he tore the gown trying to get out. When this story was mentioned to Luther he retorted, "I always thought that he had been nailed fast to the pulpit, for he never did know when to stop."[2]

Brevity

As far as we have been able to ascertain, Luther never gave his opinion concerning the outward form of the sermon. He only talks about the introduction and conclusion in one instance, and then casually in a letter to George Kunzelt, pastor at Eilenburg, who had asked his advice concerning this matter. "You inquire, venerable Father, as to my practice in beginning and

Sermon Form

1. Michelet, p. 293.
2. Mathesius, p. 231.

ending a sermon; my usage is not the common one. Omitting wordy prologues I briefly say: 'Invoke the divine grace, and say an inward Ave Maria or Paternoster, that the Word of God may be fruitful to us and God accept us.' Then I read the text, without announcing the topic. Then I explain or propound doctrines from it. At the end I say: 'Enough of this,' or 'More another time,' or 'Having said this we will pray God for His grace to enable us to do it,' or thus: 'God help us do it.' Then most briefly: 'Let us commend to God the spiritual and temporal estates, particularly so and so, for whom and for all, as we ought, we will recite the Lord's Prayer in common.' 'After this as all rise: 'The Blessing of God the Father, etc. Amen.' This is my manner of preaching."[1]

Delivery of Sermons

Concerning the delivery of sermons, Luther advises that the preacher speak slowly. He says in his Table Talks: "Speaking slowly is the best habit for the preacher, for it is less tiring. It is also a fine asset, for he can speak that much the more intelligently and thoughtfully. Seneca writes of the great Latin orator, Cicero, that he spoke slowly and as if talking to the heart (ins Herz), as you can see is the case with Dr. George Brueck."[2] The Reformer did not think very highly of gesticulations, especially those of the exaggerated kind. When he was told of some of the eccentric things done by many preachers, especially those in

1. Smith, Luther's Correspondence I, pp.. 331-332.
2. Nebe II, p. 31.

Italy, how they ran back and forth before the audience, cried out at the tops of their voices, and made faces of various descriptions, he remarked in his characteristic manner, "The world wants to be deceived; therefore preachers must make all sorts of grimaces."[1]

Summary

This account of Luther's advice as to the art of preaching shows that he was not so much concerned about the form and delivery of the sermon, as he was about the contents. It is above all the Word of God that must be preached, and that in such a manner that every one can comprehend God's plan of redemption and learn how the sinner is to be saved.

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1. Nebe II, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

THE PREACHER'S SERMONS

MARTIN LUTHER's immense capacity for work is well known to all. We hear how, in 1523, he translated two works of considerable length, wrote twenty-four treatises of varying size, preached a hundred and fifty sermons, gave a course of lectures on Deuteronomy which takes up two hundred and forty-seven pages in the Weimar edition, completed the German version of the Pentateuch and began the translation of the remainder of the Old Testament, and in addition to this wrote more than a hundred letters. This is especially remarkable when we consider the fact that he was very sick during a large part of this time.[1]

Productive Activity

From what we have been able to learn, the Reformer preached on an average of at least a hundred and fifty sermons a year from the time he began to preach in the city church at Wittenberg, in 1515, until the time of his death, in 1546. Of these a very large number have been handed down to us. All of them are in the vernacular, except those which we have from the early period of his activity, 1514-1520. Even

Sermons Handed Down to Us

1. Boehmer, Luther, p. 209.

these, although he first wrote them in Latin, are said to have been preached for the most part in German. In reading these sermons of Luther, as we now have them, we must bear in mind that the vast majority were written out and filled in from notes taken by Luther's friends, Stephan Roth, Veit Dietrich, Andreas Poach, Kaspar Kreuziger and others,[1] and it is often difficult to come to a conclusion as to just what Luther really said, how he expressed himself, and in what form his sermons were originally preached.

Church and House Postilla

This is particularly true of the sermons which have been most widely read, the Church and House Postilla. Just a glance at these will show that many of them have been worked over and enlarged. The Epiphany sermon in the Church Postilla on the Gospels contains a hundred and thirty-six pages in Lenker's "Luther's Works."[2] The Gospel sermon for the Sunday after Easter, we know for certain, is composed of two sermons which the Reformer preached at Borna.[3] On the other hand, there are several sermons in the Church Postilla on the Epistles, like those of the second Sunday in Advent and of the thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, which resemble sermon briefs and extracts rather than entire sermons. The majority of the sermons in the House Postilla were never preached from the pulpit, but were given by Luther in his home. Here he talked freely, using no particular

1. Buchwald, Predigten, I, pp. 1-6.
2. Lenker X, 319-455.
3. Nebe II, 32.

form of any kind, so that the most of these must be classed with Bible lectures. Even those which he preached from the pulpit were taken down in notes, as were his Table Talks, and were later enlarged upon. The same is true of the sermons which Luther preached throughout the country.

Textual Criticism

However, textual critics of the nineteenth century and in our own times have made wonderful progress in the study of Luther's sermons, so that it is now possible for us to form a rather accurate and reliable judgment as to the kind of a sermon Luther preached. New manuscripts are being found and compared with those which we already have, and new, revised translations and editions are being made by scholars from time to time. Among these scholars Dr. George Buchwald deserves special mention. Besides his valuable contributions to the Weimar edition of Luther's works, he has just recently completed a new edition of Luther's sermons preached from 1528 to 1532, and bases his revision on the manuscripts of Georg Roerer and Anton Lauterbach.[1]

Preached Ex Tempore

The fact that most of Luther's sermons have come down to us through the hands of others, shows that the Reformer practically always preached ex tempore. Even with the best of intentions, it would have been impossible for him to write out his sermons. His thoughts were incessantly directed to too many other things, and he

1. Buchwald, Luthers Predigten. Vol. I appeared 1925; Vol. II in 1926.

never knew when he would be called upon to preach. The natural result of his frequent and irregular preaching was that he had hardly finished one sermon, when its contents were promptly driven to the background. He shows that this was the case in a letter to George Spalatin as early as 1518. "The Weimar sermon, which you requested of me, I have forgotten entirely, with the exception of one little part, in which, I am certain, I treated about the hypocrites and boasters of their own righteousness according to the Gospel, as I am accustomed to do; of these I know for certain that there is one in particular in that court; but you will know him even if I do not mention his name. Nothing is more harmful to magistrates and rulers than that kind of men, who, although they have learned nothing, teach all things, even the religion of angels (angelorum religiones). I wish to oppose such ideas to the best of my ability. . . . I only remember this much of the sermon. If I recall any more of it I will take the time and trouble to send it to you at my earliest convenience."[1]

Preparation

However, the fact that Luther invariably preached ex tempore does not justify us in saying that he entered the pulpit without any preparation. He always prepared the general outlines of his sermons and decided upon the main theme. Furthermore, a man who always lived in and with the Bible, who prayed so fervently and sincerely, who was constantly living in trials and temptations, for whom the church and the salvation of souls was of

1. From the Latin; De Wette I, pp. 200-201.

such a great concern as was the case with Luther, that man would always be prepared to preach. A perusal of any one of his sermons will show how prepared he was. He cites the explanations of Jerome, Augustine, Gerson, and others; he knows and applies the interpretations of all the well known church fathers; in the House Postilla, for example, where he preaches to his children and house companions, he refers to Josephus and his "Antiquities," and to the Jewish War, even giving the exact source of his information. In the same Postilla he speaks of Herod, and in passing gives the history of the Herod family; he cites the Latin classics and church history, and tells legends.[1] In short, a man with such a store of knowledge, with such a fund of religious information and religious experiences, cannot be called unprepared, even if he should be called upon to preach on any text on the spur of the moment.

Sermon Texts

Since Luther continually stresses the fact that the sermon should first of all be an exposition of God's Word, we can expect nothing else but that he based his sermons on Scriptural texts. However, he did preach without a text when the occasion demanded it, as was the case when he returned from the Wartburg to preach against the radicals at Wittenberg in 1522.[2] However, the sermons without texts are the exception. In most cases Luther preaches on the Gospel and Epistle pericope texts as they had been selected and used in the

1. Broemel, Homiletische Charakterbilder, p. 101.
2. Weimar X, III Abteilung, pp. 1-64.

Roman Catholic Church. In the secondary services for the week he preferred to preach on entire books of the Scriptures, as he did, for example, on Genesis, Peter, Timothy and others. He also often took large sections out of a chapter as the basis for his sermons, as in the well known sermons on the Decalogue, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sermon on the Mount.

Pericope Texts

Luther very seldom made use of free texts. He preferred the pericope texts of the Gospels and the Epistles, not because he was convinced that they were the best texts that could be found, but because his hearers were best acquainted with them. The reading of these has always been an integral part of the Christian Church service. Furthermore, he did not want the ministers to preach on anything that they pleased, but wanted them to have something definite so that the people would be sure to hear the entire history of redemption at least once a year. We must always bear in mind that Luther had to consider the lack of education among the preachers of the day as well as among the laymen.

Treatment of Texts

A few words might also be said as to Luther's treatment of his texts. It seems almost impossible for the Reformer to treat the text by itself. He invariably treats it in connection with the problems of the day,[1] and makes concrete application to the conditions of the country at large as well as to the audiences whom he addresses.[2] He often refers to the diet of Augsburg. "There

1. See above, p. 61.
2. Buchwald I, 8.

were devils enough at Augsburg: every last Bishop brought along as many devils as a dog has fleas on St. John's day."[1]

Introductions

Consistent with his general attitude toward the form of sermons, Luther does not stress the importance of exact introductions, in which respect he differs greatly from the Greek preachers, who considered a good introduction half of a sermon. Very often he ignores any introduction whatsoever and begins immediately to interpret the text. In many instances he praises the choice of the text in his introduction. In one of his sermons he begins by saying, "I conclude that our dear fathers have chosen this Gospel to be read and preached upon this day by the help and special direction of God."[2] In another sermon introduction he says, "This is another beautiful Gospel, and treats of the foremost and chief doctrine in Christendom, namely the article, How a person becomes holy and righteous in the sight of God. And there is here placed before us a beautiful allegory, showing how reason at its best and holiness in its highest state on earth run aground upon the genuine truth and spiritualness of this matter."[3] He often tells the reason why the fathers were led to choose certain texts. In beginning an Invocavit Sunday sermon he explains: "This Gospel is read today at the beginning of Lent in order to picture before Christians the example of Christ, that they may

1. Weimar 34, II Abtheilung, p. 264.
2. Nebe II, p. 36.
3. Lenker XII, p. 423.

rightly observe Lent, which has become mere mockery (Affenspiel)."[1] In another sermon he suggests that the pericope text for the day has been faultily abbreviated. "Since pastors are expected on this day to preach on the Holy Spirit, it would be well to begin the Gospel lesson with the verses preceding. . . . These verses are closely connected with today's text, and they contain the first promise of the Holy Spirit to the apostles."[2] In some introductions he also speaks of the interpretations of the texts by some of the church fathers. "Some church fathers applied this Gospel to all the preachers from the beginning to the end of the world, and taught that the first hour was the time of Adam, the third that of Noah, the sixth that of Abraham, the ninth that of Moses, and the eleventh that of Christ and his apostles. Such talk is all right for pastime, if there is nothing else to preach."[3] Very often he calls attention to the fact that there are two things to be noted and considered in the Gospels and Epistles. "In the preface I said that there are two things to be noted and considered in the Gospels: first, the works of Christ presented to us as a gift, and the blessing on which our faith is to cling and exercise itself; secondly, the same works offered as an example and model for us to imitate and follow. All the Gospel lessons throw light first on

Christ's Works As Blessing and Example

1. Lenker, p. 134.
2. Ibid., p. 299.
3. Lenker, XII, p. 134.

faith and then on good works."[1] He says the same of the Epistles: "This Epistle does not treat of faith, but of its fruits. It teaches how a Christian should conduct himself outwardly in his relations to other men upon earth. . . . The doctrinal part consists in preaching truths not generally known; in instructing and enlightening. Exhortation is inciting and urging to duties well understood. Necessarily both obligations claim the attention of the minister, and hence Paul takes up both." These few examples are sufficient to show that Luther's introductions are not stereotyped, but that they vary considerably both as to form and content. However, all of them lead directly to the theme of the sermon text.

Body of Sermon

Luther's treatment of the body of the sermon consists primarily in this that he interpreted his texts verse by verse in an analytical manner. In complete harmony with the contemporary reaction against scholasticism with its minute differentiations and ramified divisions and subdivisions, Luther delighted in expository preaching, and this is one of his most valuable and fruitful contributions to the art of sermonizing. It is this style of preaching that naturally led him and other reformational preachers back toward the ancient loose homily as a prevailing sermon form, although it cannot be said that they entirely renounced the more compact homiletical structure which was preeminently the gift of scholasticism to pulpit oratory. Of course, both the homily and the synthetical form of sermon

1. Lenker, VII, p. 9.

as we know them today could be found only in their embryonic stage of development at the time of the Reformation. Luther's main object was to make his sermons perspicuous and intelligible. It mattered little to him whether he used the simple, analytical method or the more involved scholastical type, for he was primarily concerned with bringing home to his audiences what he thought was contained in the text. The thorough reading of any one of his sermons will assure us that they never appeared desiccated and exegetical to his audiences.

His Themes

Although the Reformer's sermons are lacking entirely in homiletical skill according to the present standards; although his introductions often contained half as much material as the main body of the sermon, and were sometimes left out entirely, there nevertheless was present in them all one of the best homiletical requirements, unity. To him the content of all texts was faith and love.[1] Each text had for him an outstanding thought which centered itself about this grand theme, and this outstanding thought, or theme, Luther never lost sight of during the entire sermon. However, he does not consider it absolutely essential always to indicate or mention this theme definitely in every sermon, but often leaves it to his hearers to find the outstanding thought and to put it into words of their own. In the sermon for the second Christmas day in the Church Postilla on the Gospels, he leads into the theme in the following manner: "In the light of

1. Mathesius, p. 187.

the preceding Gospel this text is easily understood, for it cites an example and the putting into practice of the doctrine taught there, in that the shepherds did and found all just as the angels had told them. Consequently it teaches what the results and fruits of the Word of God are, and what the marks are by which we know whether the Word of God is established in our hearts and whether it is doing its work there. Thus the Gospel shows what are 'The Fruits and Signs of the Power of the Word of God.' "[1] In the sermon on the third Christmas Day the theme is, "Christ's Titles of Honor and His Attributes."[2] That of the New Year's sermon is simply, "The Circumcision and Naming of Jesus."[3] In the sermon on the aged Simeon for the Sunday after Christmas he does not mention his theme.[4]

Theme Forms

In studying the various themes, we find that here also Luther does not apply any definite rule as to their formulation. In many instances he uses a double theme, as that in the Christmas Day sermon quoted above, in which the second part is merely a repetition of the first. Some of them, again, are very general, so that the preacher could say almost anything in the sermon following. Other themes consist of half-finished sentences, in which the omitted part must have been supplied in thought by the preacher. However in-

1. Lenker X, p. 161.
2. Ibid., p. 173.
3. Ibid., p. 308.
4. Ibid., p. 255.

different Luther seems to have been in working out his themes, it can not be claimed that he chose minor or unimportant thoughts out of the text for his consideration. He invariably strikes at the main thought and uses that as his theme.

Furthermore, Luther does not consider it an inviolable law that every text be treated in its entirety. Many of the texts are entirely too long and too full of thought to be exhausted in one sermon. He also goes into such detail in preaching on a text, that a treatment of the entire lesson would make the sermon much too lengthy. This is particularly true in his Gospel sermons. Occasionally, when he preaches twice on the same Sunday, he bases his second sermon on that part of the text which he did not use in the morning. In most of the Epistle texts, on the other hand, he takes the entire text as a basis.

Exhausting the Sermon Text

The texts which Luther treated in his sermons can be divided into two classes, the historical and the didactic.[1] The historical texts[2] are usually treated in such a manner that the historical part in them is considered as a foundation for faith as well as an example for right living, and that in the conclusion the spiritual meaning is brought to light. The Gospel sermon for the first Sunday in Advent in the Church Postilla is a good example of such a treatment. In this plan of procedure Luther follows the church fathers, who

Historical Texts

1. Lehrtexte.
2. Cf. Nebe II, 45 ff.

were invariably intent upon finding a "mystical meaning" in all the Scriptures in addition to a "moral meaning." But he does not follow them blindly, for he knows that the Gospel as a history, as a simple narration of facts, also has a value and meaning. Occasionally he chooses to extract spiritual meanings by an allegorical interpretation, but he always places such an interpretation upon sound principles. Furthermore he never places much emphasis upon such a mystical interpretation, but rather considers it a pleasant diversion.

Value of Texts As Narration

That Luther considered a text to have a value as a simple narration of facts is shown by what he says in one of his sermons. "Origen was the first to trifle thus with the holy Scriptures, and many others followed, until now it is thought to be a sign of great cleverness for the church to be filled with such quibblings. The aim is to imitate Paul,[1] who figuratively interprets the story of Abraham's two sons, the one by the free woman, or the mistress of the house, and the other by the handmaid. The two women, Paul says, represent the two covenants: one covenant makes only bondservants, . . . the other leads to liberty. . . . And the two sons are the two peoples, one of which does not go farther than the law, while the other accepts in faith the Gospel. True, this is an interpretation not directly suggested by the narrative and the text. Paul himself calls it an allegory; that is, a mystic narrative, or a story with a hidden meaning.

1. Gal 4, 22-24.

But he does not say that the literal text is necessarily the 'letter that killeth,' and the allegory, or hidden meaning, the 'spirit.' But the false teachers assert of all Scripture that the Text, or record itself, is but a dead 'letter,' its interpretation the 'spirit.' "[1]

In the Gospel sermon for the fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, as recorded in the Church Postilla, Luther shows that he also used such interpretations, but that he based these upon sound principles. "In the first place I do not wish to infer that I have interpreted this figure correctly, for I had said above, that if a clear meaning of the figures of the New Testament can not be found, they should not be built upon; for the evil spirit is a master of the meaning of figures in the Scripture."[2]

Uses Mystical Interpretation

That he considers such mystical interpretations as pleasant digressions is shown by the following statement: "But how is it that faith, or the spiritual life of the inner man, which without the Law is widowed, without a husband, is signified by the number eighty-four? Let us here follow the example of St. Augustine and try to find out the allegorical significance. For everyone knows that the numbers seven and twelve are the most glorious in Holy Scriptures."[3] Even though he uses a considerable amount of time in this digression, he

A Pleasant Digression

1. Lenker IX, p. 232.
2. Nebe II, p. 46.
3. Lenker X, p. 291.

still makes it obvious that he does not consider what he is saying as an article of faith.

What They Teach

In treating the Gospel texts Luther also likes to bring out what they teach concerning faith, love, life, and good works. Thus he says on one occasion, "We will therefore consider this Gospel under three heads: speaking first of faith, secondly of good works, and thirdly of the lesson story and its hidden meaning."[1] He often leaves out the spiritual meanings of the Gospel texts entirely.

Didactic Texts

The instructional texts of the Epistles Luther always treats verse by verse in the order of a homily. The Gospel texts he usually, but not always, treats in this manner. For example, in one of his Pentecostal sermons, based on a didactic text, he makes his divisions according to the characters that appear. "This Gospel lesson presents to us in a picture and parable that which is elsewhere taught concerning Christ's kingdom and the office of preaching in the church. . . . There are three distinct kinds of teaching here considered. Only one of them can save the soul. The first is the teaching of those whom Christ calls thieves and murderers; the second that of the porter of the sheepfold; the third that of the true shepherd, to whom the porter opens and whom he permits to enter."[2]

Above all consideration of form and division, Luther always bears in mind that it is the Word of

1. Lenker X, p. 19.
2. Ibid., XII, p. 383.

God that he must preach to the people. He is entirely of the conviction that this Word of God is not a hidden and obscure thing, but that it is clear and unequivocal, and that it can and must be understood. For that reason his sermons abound in explanations and illustrations, so that to the superficial observer it might seem that he overdoes a good thing. But if we bear in mind the average intelligence of the audiences at the time of the Reformation, we can readily see that they needed sermons that were easily comprehended.

Explanations

In nearly all of his sermons, especially in those on the Epistles, we find a great many explanations of words, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and even German. He says in one of his sermons that "in the Hebrew tongue different meanings are attached to the word 'confess,' for which we need various expressions, as for instance, to confess sins, to acknowledge, to give thanks. Thus to give thanks is in Hebrew expressed by the word 'confess,' and very appropriately so, for to give thanks is nothing but to confess that we have received, to acknowledge the kindness of the benefactor, and that the gift is not deserved."[1] Again we read, "For 'oekonomus' is Greek and signifies a steward, or one capable of providing for a house and ruling domestics."[2] In another sermon he says, "I wish the word 'justus, justitia,' were not used for the severe judicial justice; for the original meaning is 'godly, godli-

Explanation of Words

1. Lenker X, p. 299.
2. Ibid., VII, p. 70.

ness.' "[1] In another instance he mentions the inadequacy of a German word as a translation for a Greek phrase. "Such is the meaning of the little word here employed by the apostle, 'epiikia,' equity, clemency, accommodation, and which we cannot better render than by 'moderation.' "[2]

Luther has a remarkable ability in the way of portraying vividly. In one of his sermons he says, "Notice carefully Paul's words. He designates the most beautiful and vivifying time of the day, the delightful, joyous dawn, the hour of sunrise. Then the night has passed and the day broken. In response to the morning dawn, birds sing, beasts arouse themselves and all humanity arises. At daybreak, when the sky is red in the east, the world is apparently new and all things reanimated."[3] It must have been refreshing to his audiences to hear such beautiful descriptions in place of the sickening portrayals of heaven and hell, and the fantastic descriptions from the lives of the saints as they had been accustomed to hear from other preachers. We never find the Reformer indulging in portrayals merely in order to amuse the people, however, but he only makes use of this art when he wishes to clarify outstanding thoughts of the texts.

Mastery of Portrayal

It is very strange that Luther, who was so well versed in secular history, did not avail himself of this material to a better advantage in his sermons.

1. Lenker X, p. 32.
2. Lindigkeit. Lenker VII, p. 97.
3. Lenker VII, p. 16.

He mentions a few of the best known historical characters, like Theodosius and Charlemagne, but then only casually. It may be, however, that he wished to use material for his illustrations that was better known to his hearers, and there is no doubt but that Bible history was much better known to them than secular history.

Little Use of Secular History

On the other hand, the preacher does make good use of the legends of the saints, which were also well known to his constituents. But he leaves out the mystical, doubtful elements, and gives wholesome, sensible accounts. "Applicable here," he says, "are two instances, in my opinion the best in all the 'Lives of the Fathers.' One is of St. Anthony, to whom it was revealed that a tanner at Alexandria, a humble, honest mechanic, but one in no wise illustrious, was far superior to the saint because of his humility of heart. The other relates to Paphnutius, who, despite all his austerity of life, was not superior to a fifer nor to either of two married women. It was a special manifestation of grace that God revealed these two incidents at a time when monastic life was the most intense, and works prodigious."[1] In another sermon he says, "Again we read in the legends of the fathers that two brothers journeyed and one of them died of hunger for God's sake; that is, he went to hell; for they came among wicked people, who offered them something to eat, and the one said, he would not take bread from these people, but expect food from

Legends of the Saints

1. Lenker XII, p. 87.

heaven. The other took and ate and lived. That fool did nothing else but set aside God's order and tempted Him."[1]

Use of Proverbs

Luther liked very much to use pithy current sayings in order to bring home many of his thoughts. One of the sayings which he used quite often is, "Die Gelehrten die Verkehrten."[2] Another German proverb which he uses frequently is, "Wess das Herz voll ist, dess geht der Mund ueber und bei dem Gesang kennt man den Vogel, denn er singt wie ihm der Schnabel gewachsen ist."[3] He also liked to use Latin proverbs, such as "Qualis quisque est talia loquitur;"[4] "Oratio est character animi."[5] In another sermon he says, "Behuetet euch vor dem 'Quare,' vor dem Nachdenken! Du bist im Paradies, wenn du nicht das 'Quare' hoerst, sondern am Worte haengst."[6] Again, "Mit den drei Buchstaben 'Fac' wird dem Pharisaer eins auf den Schwanz gegeben."[7]

Reference to Hymns

Quite often Luther reminds his hearers of a church hymn. "Finally we must also treat of the angel's song, which we use daily in our service: Gloria in excelsis Deo. There are three things to be considered in this song, the glory of God, the peace to earth, and the good will to

1. Lenker X, pp. 366.
2. Ibid., p. 85.
3. Ibid., p. 179.
4. Ibid., p. 179.
5. Ibid., p. 179.
6. Buchwald I, p. 353.
7. Ibid., p. 566.

mankind."[1] In another sermon he says, "Likewise Mary, without doubt, also nourished the child with milk from her breast and not with strange milk, or in a manner different from that which nature provided, as we sing: ubere de coelo pleno, from her breast being filled by heaven, without injury or impurity."[2] On another occasion he refers to the ancient German hymn, "Nun bitten wir den Heiligen Geist."[3]

The Reformer also makes good use of examples from everyday life, in which art he is almost the equal of Tauler and Geiler of Kaisersberg. In one of his sermons he gives a very interesting example which no one could fail to comprehend. "By way of illustration: Suppose a lad learning the trade of shoemaking were to engage with a master foolish and knave enough to teach him that such a trade is the medium for obtaining righteousness and salvation; and suppose the boy were to believe him and to prosecute his trade under the impression that he will surely be saved thereby, and only so can be saved, and were to forsake faith, love, and all other means of salvation. How would you look at this case? Now, how would you help the boy? Would you say, 'My dear son, the trade of shoemaking does not make you righteous. It avails you nothing in heaven. You must become a tailor'? That would be but to lead him from one hell to another. You would be just about as godly as that master. Just

Examples from Life

1. Lenker X, p. 156.
2. Ibid., p. 140.
3. Nebe II, p. 66.

so do they do who advise a priest to become a monk, or a monk to enter some more difficult order. They thus cast souls and consciences from one frying pan to another. The way to help this boy is to say to him, 'My dear son, neither shoemaking nor tailoring counts in this matter. You must believe in Christ and then treat your neighbor as you believe Christ has treated you. Then you may be a shoemaker, a tailor, as please.' "[1]

In another sermon he says, "The dog barks at night and awakens the household. But that has nothing to do with God, that is, it does not help one in becoming justified before God. A cow does not get to heaven because she gives milk and bears calves; she has been created for that purpose, but that has nothing to do with heaven."[2]

Examples from Own Experience

Luther also makes good use of his own experiences as material for illustrations. Of his early life he says, "If I had owned the kingdom of France, I would have given it to that person who would have taught me that it was my duty to obey my parents, or, if I had been a servant, and he had told me, 'Do your duty faithfully. But first of all believe in Christ.' "[3] Of his life in the monastery he says, "I have seen many who have martyred themselves almost to death by their fasting and vigils. I myself have been such a one, and still feel the evil effects of that sort of

1. Lenker VII, pp. 300-301.
2. Buchwald I, p. 468.
3. Ibid., II, p. 87.

thing."[1] In one of the eight sermons which he preached against the radicals at Wittenberg he says, "Take me as an example. I opposed the pope, the indulgences, and all the papists, but not with force, nor with violence, nor with raving; but I used God's Word alone. I preached it and wrote it. Besides that I did nothing. While I was sleeping, while I was busy with other things, that very same Word rendered the papacy weak and powerless."[2]

As to Luther's language and style, it is universally conceded that he was a master in this respect. It is he who gathered the vocabulary, who standardized the modes of expression of the present German language, and his influence in this respect can hardly be overestimated. Here and there, however, we come across expressions which we should like to leave out of his sermons because they offend our tastes and show the rudeness of speech which was common in that age. In a sermon delivered before his brethren of the Augustinian Order at Gotha in 1515, he speaks against the "detractiones," slanderers, in a very uncouth manner. "Unde stercus hominum maxime omnium foedat, sed super hoc Diaboli (Teufels Dreck). . . Bonus enim odor est bona fama, natus de unguento ab extra dato: malus odor est mala fama de stercore ab intra nato. Detractor autem, etiamsi homo occulte ponat stercus suum, non sinit occultum esse, hat Lust sich darinnen zu waeltzen, ist auch nichts bessers wert, iusto, iusto

Rudeness of Language

1. Buchwald II, p. 87.
2. Lutherlesebuch, p. 223. Referred to above, p. .72.

Dei iudicio."[1] Of course, here he was not talking to a mixed audience, and could be more plainspoken. In another sermon he says, "It is such things which the popes want, veritable asses (Papstesel), sows, and spooners (Loeffel). They are veritable swine, fattening in the Lord's pig sty."[2] Most of his vehemence is poured out upon the Catholic clergy of his day. "Out of such false and wicked confidence placed in man has crept into Christianity the abuse of the worship of saints. By this the Christian church, that is, the true assembly of the faithful, have suffered notable decline and damage. What else has saints' worship been but solely a devilish thing, For thus people have reasoned: Such and such a man has been holy; such things has he done and said; therefore we will follow after him, and teach and do likewise. St. Jerome, St. Augustine and Gregory have done this; therefore it is right and I will believe it. . . . Alas, what a poor, unstable, miserable thing this is, nought but lies and dreams of man. I should damn St. Augustine and his rule, had he laid it down for the purpose of being saved thereby.[3] On the whole, however, these examples are the exception, and Luther ranks among the best preachers of his time as pertains to propriety and decorum in the pulpit. Mathesius tells us, that on one occasion Luther made use of an improper word. He appeared embarrassed and immediately asked the pardon of his

1. Weimar I, p. 50.
2. Nebe II, p. 73.
3. Lenker XIV, p. 303.

congregation.[1] Concerning his violence in general he at one time wrote Erasmus, "I, too, am irritable, and quite frequently am moved to write caustically, though I have only done so against hardened men proof against milder forms of admonition. Otherwise I think my gentleness and clemency toward sinners, no matter how far they are gone in iniquity, is witnessed not only by my own conscience, but by the experience of many."[2] He wrote to Spalatin concerning the same fault: "I cannot deny that I am often more violent than is absolutely necessary, but the fault is mainly with those, who, knowing the irritability of the dog, persist in teasing him."[3]

Luther was a master in the art of expressing his thoughts, as we have mentioned above. He is able to use short, pithy, laconic sentences, and also, when the occasion presents itself, long, involved sentences.

Treatment of Audiences

Even in the most learned sermons he likes to use the conversational method of delivery. He seems to take his hearers into his confidence and then to discuss with them the thoughts suggested by the text. He asks them questions and invites them to consider problems with him, always holding the attention and interest of all.

He frequently addresses his audiences as "Eure Liebe," "My friends," "Dear friends," "Dear friends in Christ." Occasionally he addresses an individual in the audience. He often says, "My dear man,"

1. Nebe II, p. 74.
2. Smith, Luther, pp. 86-88.
3. Michelet, p. 295.

"My dear companion," "You there." There is often a lively intercourse between the speaker and the audience, as in one of his New Year's sermons. "But you say, 'What must be your conclusion, for who then can be saved? Who does not tremble and fear death and hell? Who executes his work, or who leads an honorable life without fear?' I reply, 'Yes, but who, being filled with such fear and with hatred of God's Law and his righteousness, loves God? Where is human nature here?' "[1] *Salutations*

Luther uses personifications quite frequently. "Ehr Reuling," "Junker Zorn," "Junker Geiz" and "Junker Kain" are among his favorites. He also makes use of female personifications. "Here Madam Huldah[2] with her scornful nose, human nature, steps in and dares to contradict her God and to charge him with falsehood. She hangs upon herself her old frippery, her straw armor, natural light, reason, free-will, and human powers. She introduces heathenish books and doctrines of men, and proceeds to harp upon them saying, 'Good works do precede justification. And they are not, as God says, the works of Cain. They are good to the extent of justifying, for Aristotle taught that he who does much good will thereby become good.' To this doctrine madam firmly clings, perverting the Scriptures and presuming that God must first respect the works and then the doer."[3] *Personifications*

1. Lenker VII, p. 270.
2. An uncanny female mountain sprite.
3. Lenker VII, pp. 225-226.

Delivery

The Reformer's delivery was always adapted to the contents of his sermons. We are told that when he talked about the Gospel of Jesus, his voice and the words which he used were always mild, gentle, and refreshing. When he discussed the Law, however, his manner of talking became stern and strong. Nebe considers Luther's most powerful sermon the one which he preached on the second half of the fifteenth chapter of first Corinthians. "His sermon itself is the trumpet of judgment. As he imitated the 'taratantara' of the trumpets and the rolling of the thunder, he must have made a powerful impression upon his hearers."[1]

Irony

Luther's humor often overruns its bounds and becomes bitter irony. In one of his sermons he thus bitterly attacks the clergy: "A fidelity even more beautiful to contemplate exists among unspiritual lords and faithful stewards of the same class actively engaged in directing the spiritual welfare of souls. Certainly these are true stewards and the right sort! So extremely holy are they, St. Peter will have to be on his guard if he wishes to hold his place with them. They are our spiritual fathers, priests, monks, nuns, who exercise themselves in obedience to the pope, the holy church and every form of human institutions and orders and statutes. Among them are the paragon, the quintessence, the kernel, the marrow, the foundation; and how shall I ennumerate all the honorable titles which they assume and hold from custom? Yes, far enough

1. Nebe II, p. 78..

from custom! The beautiful little cat has pretty, soft fur."[1]

The preacher also delights in the use of antitheses. "Paul's injunction, then, might be expressed: Owe all men, that ye may owe none; own everything, that you may own nothing. This sounds paradoxical. But one indebtedness is that of love, an obligation to God. The other is indebtedness to temporal law, an obligation in the eyes of the world. He who makes himself a servant, who takes upon himself love's obligation to all men, goes so far that no one dares complain of omission; indeed, he goes farther than any one could desire. Thus he is made free. He lives under obligation to no one from the fact that he puts himself under obligation to all."[2] *Antitheses*

Occasionally Luther makes lengthy digressions in his sermons, and after some time seems to realize that he has wandered too far from his theme. In one of his sermons he takes up considerable time in discussing things which could well have been left out, and then interrupts his train of thought by saying, "Of this there is now enough; let us come back again to the Gospel."[3] In speaking of Anna and her giving thanks to God for the birth of Christ, he goes into a discussion relevant to the matter-of-fact, careless praying of his day, and ends this digression in the following manner: *Digressions*

1. Lenker VII, p. 76.
2. Ibid., VIII, p. 58.
3. Ibid., X, p. 221.

"When Luke writes that she worshiped God with supplication, he condemns the multitude of our foolish prayers, whereby we only increase and multiply our sins, because we do not serve and seek God. Now let us return again to our text."[1] Occasionally these digressions are so long as to contain seven and eight pages in the Weimar edition. But he always comes back to the main theme. When he has made a point, he likes to clinch the thoughts with a "Summa," or a "Summa Summarum."[2]

Sermon Conclusions

His conclusions are very simple. Frequently he groups his main thoughts together, as in the following example: "There is a great deal in this article, of which, in the time of temptation, we would not be deprived, for the evil spirit attacks nothing so severely as our faith. Therefore it is of the greatest importance for us to know where in God's Word this faith is set forth, and in time of temptation point to that, for the evil spirit can not stand against God's Word."[3] At other times he uses no conclusion at all. Sometimes he mentions the fact that he will go on with the text in another sermon. He is, of course, bound to no set of formulas concerning the conclusions any more than he is in respect to the other outward forms of sermonizing.

Luther himself did not think so highly of his sermons. In his Table Talks he says, "I often spat

1. Lenker X, p. 298.
2. Lutherlesebuch, p.. 223.
3. Lenker X, p. 160.

upon myself and said, as I left the pulpit, 'Shame on you, how you have preached! you have made a fine mess of it! You did not even adhere to your original outline as you had prepared it.' "[1] But he believed that he was called by God to preach, and that he was rendering a great service as a preacher. "I often complain, and the Old Adam in me often drives me to give up preaching. But still, that is my task. I have God's command and know that it is right. But they cast so many stones into my garden and so much salt into my soup, that I am compelled to complain. . . . But if I should become king or emperor today, I would not quit preaching."[2] He also felt that all of his preaching was to the glory of God. "When I preach and lecture, I know that I have preached a sermon for God and have lectured to his glory. Indeed, God himself does not need my lecturing, for he is no pupil, that he should learn from me. But he has said, 'If you love me, then love your neighbor, preach to him and comfort him. Then you have lectured and preached to me, as if I needed it, and still I do not.' "[2]

Own Estimate of His Sermons

With such a conviction as to his duty toward God and his fellow man; with such a character that not only made him liked by all with whom he came into contact, but that also rallied to his leadership the strong and the weak, the proud and the humble; with such

Conclusion

1. Nebe II, p. 83.
2. Buchwald I, p. 21.

a remarkable adaptability, such an outstanding ability of applying himself immediately and effectively to all the problems confronting his audiences and himself; with such a store of knowledge and religious experience as always lay ready at his command; with such an understanding sympathy toward all to whom he preached, it is no wonder that Luther is considered a hero of the Reformation, the man of the hour. It is no wonder that the "saints toppled from their thrones," that "purgatory sank into the abyss," and that "the god of Plato and Plotinus became silent."[1] Wherever he preached, the simple polytheism of the multitudes, the naive pantheism of the Mystics, which had long dominated the theology of the day, gave way to a freer, more stimulating search for truth, and gave the religion of Christ a new, much-needed impetus. Martin Luther as a preacher will always stand out as one of the greatest teachers of Christ and the Word of God, and his sermons will be read by thousands of ardent admirers for ages to come.

1. Boehmer, Luther, p. 277.

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